THE DEVELOPMENT OF EARLY CONGREGATIONAL THEORY OF THE CHURCH, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE FIVE "DISSENTING BRETHREN" AT THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY

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PREFACE

The purpose of this study will be the characterization of the theory and practice of classical Independency as it developed in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England, with special reference to the important work of definition carried out by the five "Dissenting Brethren"--William Bridge, Jeremiah Burroughes, Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, and Sidrach Simpson--whose programmatic essay, An Apologeticall Narration Humbly Submitted to the Honourable Houses of Parliament (1643/4), gave normative shape and substance to the Separatist-Independent-Congregational movement which had been evolving since at least the early days of Elizabeth.

The Independent-Congregational tradition took classical form under the leadership of the "five" (and others, such as John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, Richard Mather, John Davenport, and William Greenhill), and continuously and consistently proclaimed a middle way between Brownism and Presbyterianism. Furthermore, it was able for a time in New England--and for a shorter time in old England--to take on the aspect of a virtual state church. Nevertheless, the position as formulated by these men represents a definite break with the major reigning state-church-oriented ecclesiologies (Roman Catholic, Anglican, Calvinist, and Lutheran) prevalent at that date. The theory

behind the gathered churches of seventeenth-century Congregationalism was, both in old and New England, more in accord with the theory of "Brownist" and "Barrowist" Separatism in the sixteenth century than not.

For obvious political reasons they vigorously denied any connection with Separatism, which they referred to as "Brownism." They claimed to be something very different. They claimed this for theological reasons as well. They seemed convinced that they were in fact not separating from the Church of England, but only from the impurities in that Church. The difference, however, is one of degree, not of kind. The work of Henry Jacob, William Bradshaw, and William Ames in the early seventeenth century provides a transition point in the continuous spiritual evolution of a movement, if not a precisely provable historical link between the earlier and later phases of the movement.

Much has been written by way of pro and con discussion over the problem of the continuity or discontinuity between these earlier and later phases. Among those opting for essential continuity we find such historians of the movement as Frederick J. Powicke (who traces it to Barrow) and Henry W. Clark, Williston Walker, Henry Martyn Dexter, and Albert Peel (all of whom see Robert Browne as its father, with a slight bow in the direction of Richard Fitz). Champlin Burrage and Perry Miller see a discontinuity, with Geoffrey F. Nuttall taking a stand for radical discontinuity, and tracing the beginning of the "Congregational Way" to the

early 1640's, with all else as at best "pre-history."[1]

Nuttall is certainly persuasive on the point that the Congregational Way as an organized, historically-traceable church movement began in fact in the 1640's. Nevertheless, I would lean in the direction of essential continuity here, for the difference seems to me to be one of intention more than fact, and it must be remembered that after 1662 all nonconformists were by default separatists, even the state-church-oriented Presbyterians. Further, as Douglas Horton has pointed out, Congregationalism as an organized church movement and Congregationalism as a series of related ideas about the nature of the church are two somewhat different things.[2] While Williston Walker and some of the other interpreters may have been too glib in speaking of the Congregational movement as a continuous reality from Fitz and Browne through the Restoration and beyond, they surely may not be criticized for seeing that as an idea Congregationalism is clearly traceable from Robert Browne or Richard Fitz (and even, though less clearly, from certain parishes and monastic movements of the Middle Ages[3]). Since this dissertation is a study in the history of ideas primarily, I shall be less disposed to see a radical

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[1]See Chapter IV of this study for a discussion of this matter in documented detail.

[2]Douglas Horton, "Introduction," Williston Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1960; reprinted from the 1893 ed.).

[3]Ibid., p. xii.

break between the "pre-history" and the history of Congregationalism than Mr. Nuttall would.

A more important point, it seems to me, is that this whole controversy is rather irrelevant to the characterization of a developing and solidifying theological position on the nature of the church. Excessive concern over whether Congregationalism started with Fitz, Browne, Barrow, Jacob, or the "Congregational men" of the 1640's, or over whether certain phases were truly Congregational, separatist, "semi-separatist," or merely hazy prolegomena to a movement, may tend to obscure for the observer just what was being developed ecclesiologically in those years.

It would, then, be my contention that one may look back upon the whole development and see it as a theologically continuous and consistent evolution (at least from Browne and Barrow on), and then characterize a position whose working out spanned the years from Elizabeth through Charles II, with a peak of clarification being reached in the work of the Dissenting Brethren and their New England confederates in the 1640's and 1650's. One cannot necessarily prove or illustrate a specific indebtedness of one generation of "Congregational" leaders to another. Nor can one disprove this. The Dissenting Brethren are clearly the spiritual descendants of the Barrowists, even if they were not necessarily on speaking terms with the remnants of the Barrowist tradition, or with the memory of it.

I have said that the classical Independentism of the Dissenting Brethren and others represents a definite break

with the major ecclesiologies of the past. It was not a radical break, such as Anabaptism represented on the Continent in the sixteenth century, because: (1) the Dissenting Brethren, being much more willing to seek accommodations, were not nearly as antagonistic toward the men in power in church and civil state as were their spiritual progenitors the Barrowists; (2) in all other major areas of Christian theology the Dissenting Brethren were completely at one with the developing "Calvinist" orthodoxy--i.e., the "federal theology" of second and third generation "Calvinists"--of the larger Puritan movement; and (3) the ecclesiology of the Dissenting Brethren encompassed substantially the same concept of a called-out covenant people of God (as opposed to a hierarchical superstructure) that had been part of the genius of the larger Puritan movement and (perhaps to a lesser extent) of the Reformation positions of Zurich, Geneva, and Wittenberg as well.

Theirs was a definite break, but not a radical one. The break came at several points: God's people were self-professed "visible saints," gathered into semi-autonomous congregations of believers. A loose confederation of these congregations constituted the true visible church of Christ, and beyond this there was no authentic church. And the congregations or "churches" were organized as a covenanted people according to the "scriptural" pattern, with pastors, teachers, local elders (to whom the people were to be obedient), deacons, widows, and a consenting congregation which called and elected its officials.

Synods, if they were held, were to be advisory in their capacity, and did not constitute legal presbyterian control (the "presbytery" being within the local congregation).

The claim that beyond the loose confederation of congregations there was no visible church is qualified somewhat in the Restoration period by Philip Nye and others, as Dissent sought a modus vivendi with the Establishment. The national Church (in distinction from "gospel churches") was seen to have certain valid preliminary functions--preaching, teaching, constituting the Christian commonwealth at worship. But this Restoration attempt at accommodation came in a period later than that in which these people were developing their central position, and does not seem to alter their case materially.[4]

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[4]See Chapter VII, section D, of this study for an explication of Nye's views on the church in the Restoration.

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PART I. INTRODUCTION:

THE SEPARATIST-CONGREGATIONAL PURITANS AS COVENANT THEOLOGIANS: A BASIS FOR CHURCHMANSHIP

CHAPTER I

THE IDEA OF THE COVENANT AMONG THE PURITANS

Covenant theology was extremely important to the Puritan movement, so important as to warrant a designation as one of the central organizing motifs of that movement's doctrinal stance. An earlier generation of interpreters assumed that this peculiarity of the dogmatic outlook was a logical outgrowth of Puritanism's rootage in Calvinism. This view is taken, for instance, in the article on "Covenant Theology" by W. Adams Brown in Hasting's Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics.[1] Perry Miller, however, challenged this traditional position in his essay "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity," first published in The Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts for February 1935, and in his book The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century.[2]

Recent critics of Miller have asserted that he overdid the de novo aspect of the "federal theology," and that if it was not simply second or third generation Calvinism, neither was it by any means totally divorced from a continental

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[1] James Hastings and John Selbie, eds., IV (1912), pp. 216-24.

[2] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961; orig. pub. 1939, reissued 1954).

Protestant background. Thus Leonard J. Trinterud, in his article "The Origins of Puritanism," while quite respectful of Miller's stance, stresses heavily the Rhineland milieu for pre-Puritan covenant theology, and the degree of covenant theology to be found in pre-Puritan English reformers.[3]

Miller's position is more directly challenged in the articles "Calvin and Covenant Theology," by Everett H. Emerson,[4] and "The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology," by Jens G. Møller.[5] Miller himself, in the new introductory remarks to "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity," penned for inclusion in the reprinting of this article in Errand into the Wilderness, claimed that he had been misunderstood, and that in fact he had not intended to contend "that the Puritans were not and never had been Calvinists."[6]

I shall attempt first to characterize something of the position of the covenant idea in Puritanism through following the arguments of the controversy just outlined, and through looking at a representative Puritan statement on the covenant.

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[3]Church History, XX (March, 1951), 37-57. Significantly, what he says about the latter point is strongly confirmed in a section on Tyndale in the recent book by William A. Clebsch, England's Earliest Protestants: 1520-1535 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), chap. 11.

[4]Church History, XXV (June, 1956), 136-44.

[5]The Journal of Ecclesiastical History, XIV (April, 1963), 46-67.

[6](New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1964; first pub. 1956), p. 48.

In the second chapter of this introductory part of the study I shall investigate representative Separatist-Independent doctrinal statements on the covenant in order to focus attention upon the thinking of adherents of that particular branch of Puritanism. And in the third chapter I shall discuss briefly several late sixteenth and seventeenth-century Separatist-Independent churches and their specific covenants, in order to demonstrate how the idea of the covenant worked itself out in practice in these gathered congregations of pilgrim people.

That definitive statement of mainstream English Puritanism, the "Westminster Confession of Faith," which was presented to Parliament by the Assembly of Divines on December 7, 1646,[7] sums up the covenant in six succinct paragraphs, as follows:

> I. The distance between God and the creature is so great that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.
> II. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.
> III. Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely

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[7]David Masson, The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connexion with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of His Time, Vol. III: 1643-1649 (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1965; first pub. 1896), p. 512; Journals of the House of Commons, From November the 5th 1547 . . . (London: H. M. Stationery Office, 1803-13), Vol. V, p. 2.

offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.

IV. This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in the Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed.

V. This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law and in the time of the gospel: under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foresignifying Christ to come, which were for that time sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.

VI. Under the gospel, when Christ the substance was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the word and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper; which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity and less outward glory, yet in them it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not, therefore, two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under various dispensations.[8]

Herein we find the characteristic points: the condescension of the high and holy God in opening a more sure way of access to his favor; the original "covenant of works" with Adam; the fall; the second covenant or "covenant of grace," requiring faith and symbolized as a testament or covenant inherent in the atoning death of Christ; the anticipation of

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[8]The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines . . . concerning a Confession of Faith. . . . (London and Edinburgh: Evan Tyler, 1647), reproduced in Philip Schaff, ed., The Creeds of Christendom, Vol. III: The Evangelical and Protestant Creeds (New York: Harper & Bros., 1919), pp. 616-18. Schaff has modernized the spelling. I have omitted the voluminous scripture references given in footnotes in support of all statements in the Confession.

Christ in the time of the law, and the exhibition of Christ through word and sacrament in the time of the gospel, all constituting one covenant of grace.

W. Adams Brown's article in Hasting's Encyclopedia, referred to above,[9] provides an excellent commentary on these points. He first states that we must distinguish between the covenant idea, found in many places in the Old Testament, and the covenant theology as such:

> The covenant theology describes a special type of Christian thought which gives this idea a central importance not elsewhere assigned to it, and uses it as the organizing principle of the entire theological system. According to this scheme, God at the creation entered into an agreement with Adam as the federal head of the race, promising to him and to his descendants eternal life on condition of his obedience to the Divine command that he should not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and threatening him with eternal death for himself and his descendants in case of his disobedience. Adam having failed to stand the test, God entered into a second agreement with Christ as the second Adam, on behalf of the elect, promising them forgiveness and eternal life in consideration of Christ's perfect obedience and satisfaction imputed to them by faith, as well as all the gifts and graces which are necessary to the realization of this supreme blessing in experience. The covenant theology in its developed form is a scheme of doctrine in which the entire system of divinity is expressed in the terms of these two covenants and man's assurance of salvation based upon the fact that he is included in the latter.[10]

Brown then goes on to make this crucial point:

> In order to understand its origin and significance, it is necessary to consider the problem which it was designed

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[9]Above, p. 1.

[10]Brown, "Covenant Theology," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, IV, 216.

to solve.

(2) The covenant as a ground of assurance. This problem was, in a word, the reconciliation of the sovereignty of God with man's assurance of salvation. The federal theologians, as they are called, were Calvinists. Their major premise was the absolute sovereignty of God. Man, in their view, had no independent right as against his Maker. Unquestioning submission to the Divine command was his duty. Perfect obedience, were such possible, carried with it no merit, and could guarantee no reward. If, then, man was to be admitted to the Divine fellowship or assured of the Divine favour, it could be only by some voluntary condescension on God's part, establishing by arbitrary enactment relations which had no necessary foundation in nature. The importance of the covenant for these theologians consisted in its assurance that such condescension had, as a matter of fact, taken place. By the covenant God not only bound Himself to a certain definite line of conduct, so far as man was concerned, and in so far restricted the freedom of His own choice, but He made known in detail to His creature the nature and conditions of His gracious purpose, and so removed the uncertainty to which he would otherwise have been exposed.[11]

The author proceeds to trace in outline the history of the covenant theology prior to its Puritan manifestation, and then to discuss its expression in the writings of such representative figures as William Perkins, John Preston, William Ames, Archbishop James Ussher, and John Koch or Cocceius.

Covenant or federal theology is thus characterized as a brand of Calvinism, but Calvinism with a plus factor, the assurance that the sovereign and arbitrary God has been of his own volition "tamed" and made predictable under certain conditions, and for certain men (the elect). The similarity of this construction to that of the late medieval nominalists such as William of Ockham and Gabriel Biel is striking and

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[11] Ibid., pp. 216-17.

instructive. For these thinkers held that while God in his absolute power (de potentia absoluta) could act in nature and toward men in any one of an infinite variety of ways, perhaps arbitrarily and frighteningly, in fact he has in Christ ordained (in the realm de potentia ordinata) that he will act in certain predictable and salvific ways toward those who fulfill certain conditions whereby they merit the bestowal of the habitus of grace. He has voluntarily limited and circumscribed his own actions for man's benefit.[12]

Also of interest is the similarity here to the Scotist idea of a covenant or "pactum" which God makes with the Church to infuse grace in the soul when the sacramental symbol is given. "Thus regarded, it can be positively said of the sacrament only that it, by inciting faith, prepares for the reception of grace ('the notion of faith is excited through the exhibition of the sign'). The infusion of grace results through a directly creative act of God in the soul, i.e.: 'By such covenant the Lord has obligated himself to, in some way, give grace to him who receives the sacrament.'"[13] In this case the "preparation for salvation" is done through

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[12]See Heiko Oberman, The Harvest of Medieval Theology (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), pp. 30-47, 132-178, et passim.

[13]Reinhold Seeberg, Text-Book of the History of Doctrines (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1958), Vol. II, pp. 126-27. François Wendel, in Calvin (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), seesthis Scotist notion as being heavily influential in Calvin's thought on the Eucharist (pp. 344-45); and Hermann Sasse, in This Is My Body (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1959) sees the same effect on Melanchthon's thought (p. 315, n. 30).

reception of the sacrament.

The analogy breaks down at the point of predestination, however. For in late medieval theology, for practical purposes, those who would come to this blessing and do all that they could (facere quod in se est) would merit grace, while, at least formally, the condescension applied in Puritan thought only to those whom God had chosen from all eternity on the basis of his will alone. Even this distinction is not rigid, however, for in later manifestations of the Puritan covenant theology some degree of "preparation for salvation" was seen to have a virtually binding effect upon God, who was to be confronted with the demand that he keep his part of the covenant promise for all who plead it sincerely. The dividing line between this "Calvinism" and outright "Arminianism" was more and more obscured, especially in New England,[14] until Jonathan Edwards appeared on the scene to reassert the strictures of the earlier line of Calvinist thought.[15]

For mainline Puritanism, though, the sovereignty of God

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[14]Perry Miller spells this out in his article "Preparation for Salvation in Seventeenth-Century New England," Journal of the History of Ideas, IV (January-October, 1943), 253-86.

[15]This must not, however, be said of Edwards in an entirely unqualified way. Edwards was still very much in the tradition of Puritan covenant theology, and was somewhat ambiguous on the point of faith as a condition for entering the covenant--as to whether this faith had any appearance of being a "work." See C. Conrad Cherry, "The Puritan Notion of the Covenant in Jonathan Edwards' Doctrine of Faith," Church History, XXXIV (September, 1965), 328-341, especially 339-40.

shines through the covenant relationship, as John von Rohr points out in his article "Covenant and Assurance in Early English Puritanism."[16] The covenant is "conditional" upon man's faith, to be sure. But even that faith is absolutely the free gift of God, "consequent of election. As Ames puts it, 'the condition of the Covenant is also promised in the Covenant.'"[17] And as Richard Sibbes wrote, "it is a 'free covenant' which 'cometh from God merely of grace' and into which we are brought because 'he giveth us hearts to take him for our God.'"[18]

Perry Miller, whose interpretation became pivotal for a whole generation of students of Puritanism--particularly American, but English Puritanism as well--will take the same men and many of the same quotations as such scholars as Brown and von Rohr, and see rather different underlying motivations. Perhaps it is too strong, though, to say <u>different</u> motivations. Rather, he sees as full-blown tendencies that which others see as tentative leanings. For central to his understanding is an historical vision of the federal theologians as deeply immersed in both the Reformed theology of their ancestors and the emphasis upon a reasonable universe which was beginning to permeate the intellectual world of their own day, and caught in the dilemma of how to reconcile the two. He writes:

> Here, then, was the task which seventeenth-century

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[16]<u>Church History</u>, XXXIV (June, 1965), 195-203.

[17]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 201. [18]<u>Ibid</u>.

> Calvinists faced: the task of bringing God to time and reason, of justifying His ways to the transcendent Force, the inexpressible and unfathomable Being, by the laws of ethics, and of doing this somehow without losing the sense of the hidden God, without reducing the Divinity to a mechanism, without depriving Him of unpredictability, absolute power, fearfulness, and mystery.[19]

The great task, then, confronting the covenant theologians was the transformation of the awful and arbitrary mystery which was the Calvinistic God of their fathers into a cosmic force which behaved with a reasonable modicum of predictability according to the norms of goodness, justice, truth, and mercy which men in the seventeenth century accepted as the highest ideals imaginable.[20] And the covenant doctrine appeared to these men the perfect vehicle whereby they might obtain the best of both worlds. The covenant became a legal agreement obliging that God who still made reasonable men uneasy with his unpredictableness to behave in acceptable ways.[21] Miller continues:

> The covenant made it possible to argue that while God elects whom He pleases, He is pleased to elect those who catch Him in His plighted word, and that it is up to fallen man to do so. The subtle casuistry of this dialectic is altogether obvious. Yet the spectacle of these men struggling on the one hand to maintain the subordination of humanity to God without unduly abasing human values, and on the other hand to vaunt the powers of human intellect without losing the sense of divine transcendence, vividly recreates what might be called the central problem of the seventeenth century as it was confronted by the Puritan mind.[22]

Miller makes a considerable point of the ethical possibilities opened up by the covenant approach. Man is virtually

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[19]Miller, Errand . . . , p. 56.

[20]Ibid., p. 66.

[21]Ibid., p. 72.

[22]Ibid., p. 74.

called upon to prove that he is in covenant relationship with God by striving as best he can to manifest that relationship in his daily conduct. Perfection is not necessary, for Christ has fulfilled the law in our behalf. But the fact of trying, striving, pressing on to the goal, this is the proof of election.[23] In the words of John Cotton: "God accepts at our hands a willing minde, and of childe-like indeavours; if we come with childe-like service, God will spare us; a father will accept the poor indeavours of his childe for the thing it selfe."[24] The similarity of all this to the facere quod in se est doctrine of late medieval nominalism is very striking.

In The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, Miller portrays the covenant theology as having finally evolved to the point where it is in effect devoid of predestinarian implications, though lip service is still paid to the earlier stance. He explains thus:

> A man must have God's assistance to accept the Covenant, but still it is thrust upon him so persuasively that as long as he retains the faculties of reason and will he is accountable for not accepting. 'There is no man exempted, no man debarred, no man hindered to take grace upon those tearmes, if he will condescend to God's conditions'--so runs the astounding exhortation of New England predestinarians; no matter what a man's condition or spiritual poverty, 'if he will but choose and prize Christ above all other things, he shall receive

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[23] Ibid., pp. 82-83.

[24] John Cotton, The Covenant of Gods Free Grace, Most Sweetly Unfolded, and Comfortably Applied to a Disquieted Soul... (London: Printed by M.S. for John Hancock, 1645, also quoted in ibid., p. 83).

him, and grace, and salvation by him.'[25]

Miller, then, sees these "federal theologians" as highly imaginative creators of a virtually new thing under the sun in their day. They have refined the doctrinal material of original Calvinism in the light of reason and experience, and have fashioned a highly useful instrument for reducing to an acceptable level the elements of fear and uncertainty in one's relationship to God and assuring salvation to those who will earnestly strive after it. They have skirted the boundaries of Arminianism, if not all but formally joined the ranks. It is a unique achievement.[26]

The trend of criticism of Perry Miller's thesis which has been building up in the past several years seems to center around the assertion that this achievement was in fact not so unique. The necessity to modify a harsh and arbitrary predestinarianism had actually been felt strongly by others besides the Puritans sometime before the high-watermark of the Puritan era in the seventeenth century. This point is made by Leonard J. Trinterud, in his excellent and balanced article, "The Origins of Puritanism."[27] Trinterud speaks of newer trends in Puritan scholarship. He writes:

> What seems to be emerging is an account of Puritanism in which the heritage from medieval English

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[25]Miller, The New England Mind: . . . , p. 393.

[26]Ibid., pp. 395-97.

[27]Trinterud, Church History, XX.

> thought and life is the controlling element. Puritanism was indigenous, not exotic, to England. Moreover, those foreign influences which were taken up by the English Puritans as they sought to give intellectual form to their ideas and ideals, were taken up not primarily from John Calvin of Geneva, but from the Reformers of the Rhineland: Zwingli, Jud, Bullinger, Oecolampadius, Capito, Bucer, Martyr, and a host of other leaders in the Reformation movement in Zurich, Basel, Strassburg, and other Rhineland cities.[28]

Trinterud traces the origins of Tudor Puritanism to such men as William Tyndale, John Frith, John Bale, John Hooper, and John Bradford.[29] Covenant theology as such is to be found in the writings of William Tyndale.

> Tyndale asserts that the key to the Scriptures is to be found in that all of God's promises are conditional. God's promises constitute a covenant, or appointment, by which God promises certain blessings to men on the condition that they keep his laws.[30]

And as for covenant theology[31] in the Rhineland before the Puritan era, "as early as 1525 the Basel reformer Oecolampadius, in a commentary on Isaiah, had put forth the view that the eternal covenant of God with man was the law of love. . . . To be blessed of God man must keep this covenant by obeying this law."[32] Further, Zwingli, Capito, and Cellarius made public

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[28] Ibid., p. 39. [29] Ibid., p. 38. [30] Ibid., p. 39.

[31] I am using the term "covenant theology" broadly here, to cover the thought of all who made a point of the centrality of God's covenant with man. This includes both those earlier Continental Protestant theologians for whom predestination was still an important consideration, and those later Puritans for whom it was a doctrine to which they in fact paid only lip service.

[32] Ibid., p. 41.

use of the covenant concept in the years immediately following this.

> From these beginnings the law-covenant principle came quickly to be the organizing principle of the entire Rhineland reformation movement despite whatever other differences may have existed among the various leaders. The covenant became a prominent feature in the theological and exegetical works of Bullinger, Jud, Pellican of Zurich, Bibliander of Basel, Musculus of Augsburg, as well as those men already mentioned.[33]

Covenant ideas among the Rhineland Reformers Trinterud sees as at least in part traceable to medieval social contract theories. Tyndale and Frith are, he thinks, partially dependent upon the Rhinelanders, but also presume to find the notion directly from biblical sources.[34] And Rhinelanders in exile in England during Edward VI's reign introduced covenant theology there. Such were Peter Martyr, Martin Bucer, Paul Fagius, and Francisco Dryander. Further, the Marian exiles picked up covenant theology from the Rhinelanders.[35] Zachary Ursinus and Caspar Olevianus at Heidelberg University gave further delineation to the covenant theology, and by the 1580's the "covenant of works" was a widespread idea on the Continent, incorporating the state contract theory of the middle ages.[36]

In 1585 Dudley Fenner, as associate of Cartwright, in his exile in Holland (Antwerp and then Middleburg), published a most thoroughly worked out covenant scheme utilizing the double covenant idea, a covenant of works, and a covenant of

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[33] Ibid. [34] Ibid., pp. 41-43.

[35] Ibid., pp. 44-45. [36] Ibid., p. 48.

grace or redemption.[37] Cartwright adopted the idea himself, and very quickly the Puritan group began to employ the double-covenant scheme as something generally received by all. Moreover, as the Puritan religious movement and the parliamentary political movement began to make common cause, they had also now a common theoretical outlook. Parliamentary thought on the state contract had enjoyed a long history in England reaching back as far as John Fortescue in the fifteenth century. By 1590 the double-covenant idea was being used also by some Scottish theologians.[38]

Thus the covenant scheme is shown by Trinterud to possess a long history antedating the Puritan era, a history with a twofold genesis, in the Rhineland Reformed theology and the early English Reformers of Henry VIII's reign, both traceable in turn in part to medieval social contract theories. Tyndale's law-covenant scheme alluded to by Trinterud is expanded upon, as we have noted earlier, in William A. Clebsch's England's Earliest Protestants: 1520-1535.[39]

Trinterud is not specifically critical of Perry Miller's possible failure to recognize adequately the origins and intellectual antecedents of seventeenth-century Puritan covenant theology. Jens G. Møller, however, in his article mentioned

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[37]The title of the work is Sacra Theologia.

[38]Ibid., pp. 48-49.

[39]Clebsch, chap. XI.

above,[40] is quite critical at this point. He argues as follows:

> Miller presents his interpretation of the covenant in book IV [of The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century] under the general heading of Sociology! Although he seems to be aware of the existence of earlier covenant theology he tends to regard William Perkins as the inventor of the puritan concept of the covenant. In Miller's understanding covenant theology means essentially the puritan theologians' counter-action to tendencies within their own camp, viz., Arminianism and Antinomianism. This might be true for the period about 1650, but only then. Finally Miller regards covenant theology as implying a departure from essential Calvinism. This is also true to a certain extent but calls for a much more careful analysis than Miller's.[41]

Møller goes on to illustrate the presence of important aspects of the covenant idea in Zwingli and Bullinger, as Trinterud has done also. He then devotes more space to a demonstration of the Covenant of Grace in the writings of Calvin:

> When Calvin takes over the covenant idea he, of course, clearly states the ethical implications: 'In making the covenant, God stipulates for obedience on the part of his servant.' However, the covenant made with Abraham was not simply an agreement between God and man. It was the Almighty God who gave the covenant, and in giving it, it is 'as if God had said, "See how kindly I indulge thee: for I do not require integrity from thee simply on account of my authority, which I might justly do; but whereas I owe thee nothing, I condescend graciously to engage in a mutual covenant."' This covenant which God gave to the fathers is the same as he gives to us in Christ. From the beginning of the world God covenants with man and binds man to him through one and the same doctrine and Law. . . . The covenant which God entered into with fallen man is essentially a covenant of grace, in which he promises

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[40] p. 2.

[41] Møller, The Journal of Ecclesiastical History, XIV, 46.

everlasting life through faith in Christ. . . .[42]

Møller adds that it is on this point of the primacy of the covenant of grace "that Calvin makes his most important contribution to the covenant theology."[43] Møller has conclusively demonstrated that the idea of the Covenant of Grace was not in fact a radical departure from or improvement upon essential Calvinism on the part of the Puritans, as Miller seems to imply.[44] Rather, the radical predestinarian Calvin was apparently concerned to emphasize not so much predestination as a bare and brutal dogma out of the context of God's redeeming love, as the covenant of grace fashioned by a merciful God who had decided out of the fullness of his love to elect some for salvation. Sovereignty and election are present, and are important doctrines; and not everyone, to be sure, will be saved. But a covenant has been made as an act of gracious condescension of a merciful God. This point is therefore not new with the federal theologians. They only expand the application of the point. Møller proceeds in

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[42] Ibid., p. 49. The quotations from Calvin are from the Commentary upon Genesis (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), pp. 443, 445.

[43] Ibid., p. 50.

[44] This is shown in Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion, trans. by Henry Beveridge (2 vols.; London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1957), Bk. II, Chap. XI, sections 7-12, where the old and new covenants are spoken of, and the Covenant of Grace is discussed; and Bk. III, Chap. XVII, sections 5 and 6, which speaks of the fact that "the Lord keeps a covenant of mercy with those who love him."

his article to discuss Tyndale and Perkins at some length, with voluminous quotations from the works of each.

Finally, the article by Everett H. Emerson, mentioned earlier,[45] illustrates the point that covenant theology is to be traced to the Continent, to Zwingli and Bullinger, to Calvin, Ursinus, and Olevianus; and to Tyndale and Frith on the early English scene.[46] The author also contends that Perry Miller has greatly overdone the possible contrast between the arbitrariness of the bestowal of grace by God in Calvin's thought and the orderliness and predictability of the covenant scheme. But grace is not for Calvin simply "a flash of supernatural light, a rape of the surprised will."[47]

> Two points here deserve attention. First, Calvin clearly assumes that those who are converted are exposed to the preaching of the gospel before grace works conversion. Faith is higher than understanding; but a degree of understanding--though of course it is not adequate for conversion--Calvin assumes will come before conversion. Second, conversion is for Calvin just what Miller says it is for the covenant theologians, a reinvigoration of the various capacities of the soul, illuminating the mind and strengthening and supporting the affections ('the heart'). The gifts of the Spirit are manifold.[48]

Also, Emerson finds in Calvin some degree of "preparation for salvation," while Miller does not; and he disagrees with Miller about the allegedly radically inscrutable and arbitrary nature of Calvin's God. Emerson speaks, in further

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[45] P. 2.

[46] Emerson, Church History, XXV, 136-37.

[47] Ibid., p. 139. [48] Ibid.

refutation of Miller, of a "near-identity of the approach of Calvin and that of the covenant theologians,"[49] and illustrates his point with a quotation from a sermon of Calvin's on the Ten Commandments.[50] The difference between Calvin and the covenant theologians was only one of emphasis. "Puritan thought differs from Calvin's in being much more concerned with man's salvation and less concerned with God's glory."[51]

Having now followed the course of some of the current scholarly discussion of Puritanism and the covenant, and having in the process had occasion to set forth some definitional statements as to the nature of Puritan covenant theology generally, we now continue the over-all discussion of the topic with a consideration of covenant theology in the Separatist-Independent-Congregational wing of English Puritanism.

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[49] Ibid., p. 141.

[50] Ibid., pp. 141-42.

[51] Ibid., p. 142.

CHAPTER II

THE COVENANT AMONG THE SEPARATISTS AND INDEPENDENTS

Before proceeding further with the topic of covenant theology and the Independents, it will be helpful to take note of a terminological point.

The reader will notice that I am using the terms "Independent" and "Congregational" in this study without a clear distinction between them being given. In doing so I have merely followed general practice. In the literature of and about the Congregational movement the two terms are usually used more or less interchangeably. The term "Separatist" is clearer in delineation. Normally this refers to those congregations and their leaders in Elizabethan England which made a particular point of setting themselves apart from the "heathen, popish, corrupt" Church of England and all its ways and works, and to the remnants of this tradition which endured into the seventeenth century, in England and Holland. In twentieth-century use, there is a "Congregational Union of England and Wales," which operates an "Independent Press." The term "Independent" has survived in much healthier fashion on the British side of the Atlantic as a recognized referrent to a denominational tradition. But, one could hardly say that it has survived in America at all in this

regard.

As for the seventeenth century itself, the term "Independent" generally points more toward the manifestations of the tradition extant in the early seventeenth century, and connotes congregations which have organized themselves along lines in varying degrees independent of the practices and authority-structures of the Church of England as established, but which have not made a moral point of total separation. The Dissenting Brethren consider the term a slur upon their movement,[1] suspecting their enemies of using it (and "Brownist," which was used by various opponents of all types of Congregationalism as a pejorative term) to indicate total lack of recognition for any need for submitting to any form of dependence upon religious or civil authority beyond the local congregation. "Congregational" as a term for the movement began to come into use in the 1640's, and by the 1650's and the Restoration period was fully established. Robert S. Paul says that John Cotton was "the first to clarify the use of the word," in The Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared.[2] "Independent" was, however, still used also.

"Independency" or "Independent" churches were terms used

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[1] An Apologeticall Narration . . . , pp. 23-24, as reproduced in William Haller, Tracts on Liberty in the Puritan Revolution: 1638-1647, Vol. II: Facsimiles, Part I (New York: Columbia University Press, 1934), pp. 331-332.

[2] Robert S. Paul, An Apologeticall Narration (Philadelphia: United Church Press, 1963), p. 64, n. 18.

in a broader context as well. A church could be "Independent" but not part of the "Congregational" denomination, or what became the Congregational denominational movement. Baptist or Quaker congregations, for instance, might be referred to as "Independent." Or the term could be used to suggest a wider political movement which had only a tenuous connection with Congregationalism as a denominational indication or a locus of doctrine on the nature of the church. W. K. Jordan, in The Development of Religious Toleration in England,[3] uses the term this way with considerable consistency, reserving the term "Congregational" for the narrower doctrinally-oriented aspects of the movement.

The situation with regard to the use of these terms was, then, very fluid in the seventeenth century; and it has continued to be so in subsequent writing about the seventeenth century. Further clarification will, hopefully, be achieved in the course of this study.

If it has been helpful to our discussion to begin our consideration of covenant theology in Puritanism generally with a quotation from the section on covenant in the Westminster Confession, then in parallel fashion it will be helpful to begin our perusal of Separatist-Independent-Congregational thought with the corresponding section from the Savoy Declaration

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[3]Particularly in Vol. III; From the Convention of the Long Parliament to the Restoration, 1640-1660 (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1965; first pub. 1938).

of 1658 (fully titled A Declaration of the Faith and Order Owned and Practised in the Congregational Churches in England), of which we shall hear more later in this study.[4] Chapter VII of the Declaration, "Of God's Covenant with Man," reads as follows:

> The distance between God and the Creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their Creator, yet they could never have attained the reward of life, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of Covenant.
>
> II. The first Covenant made with man, was a Covenant of Works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect personal obedience.
>
> III. Man by his fall having made himself uncapable of life by that Covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life, his holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.
>
> IV. This Covenant of Grace is frequently set forth in the Scripture by the name of a Testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the Testator, and to the everlasting Inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed.
>
> V. Although this Covenant hath been differently and variously administered in respect of Ordinances and Institutions in the time of the Law, and since the coming of Christ in the flesh; yet for the substance and efficacy of it, to all its spiritual and saving ends, it is one and the same; upon the account of which various dispensations, it is called the Old and New Testament.[5]

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[4]See chap. VIII, section D.

[5]Walker, pp. 374-75. The underlining indicates boldfaced type, and occurs at those points where there is a deviation from the Westminster Confession. Sections V and VI of the corresponding chapter of the Westminster Confession are here condensed into one section, number V.

The Savoy Declaration, drafted by a representative assembly of seventeenth-century English Independents under the leadership of John Owen and several of the Dissenting Brethren, was because of the political situation something of a dead letter in England at the time; but it became pivotal for the development of New England Congregational thought.[6] It is fashioned after the Westminster Confession, with variations to bring the doctrinal material in line with Independent polity. Its great similarity to the Westminster Confession already quoted in this study[7] could serve as argument against what may appear to be repetitive quotation here. On the contrary, though, the very similarity serves an important purpose. It puts us on notice that the Independent wing of Puritanism in fact deviated little in doctrinal matters other than polity from the mainstream of Puritan thought, and that this generalization holds true on the matter of the theory of covenant relationship between man and God. The difference between Independency and Puritanism generally came, rather, as we shall see in the third chapter of this study, at the point of the application of the theory to local congregations--a point of ecclesiology rather than theology. Presbyterian-type Puritanism did not usually make this application. The furthest that Presbyterianism went as a general rule toward application of the covenant theory was the

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[6] Ibid., pp. 352-53.

[7] Above, pp. 3-4.

National Covenant in Scotland (1638) and the Solemn League and Covenant (1643).

The tendency of the Elizabethan Separatists, and the Seventeenth-century Independents and Congregationalists as well, to think of God's covenant with his people in less general terms than those adopted by Presbyterian-leaning Puritans is shown in several of their writings. Men of the Congregational Way were Puritans whose sense of the covenanted calling of God was particularly acute. For them it had implications for the organization of the called and covenanted church, the peculiar community of faith, the congregation. Herein the covenant became for them a living reality, rather than in the broader national sphere, as in the Scottish National Covenant. God covenants with his elect, his own people, and this people is capable of confidently identifying itself and proceeding toward organization of "true" and "visible" churches on the basis of this confidence.

In Robert Browne's A Book Which Sheweth the Life and Manners of All True Christians, and Howe Unlike They Are unto Turkes and Papists, and Heathen Folke (1582) there is contained an extended section on "The Calling, Planting, and Couenaunt of the Church," together with a discussion of baptism as the outward seal of the covenant. I reproduce it here, in part, as an excellent summary statement of the position of covenant theology among these budding Congregationalists:

The Church planted or gathered, is a companie or number of Christians or beleeuers, which by a willing couenant made with their God, are vnder the gouernment of god and Christ, and kepe his lawes in one holie communion: because Christ hath redeemed them vnto holines & happines for euer, from which they were fallen by the sinne of Adam.

The Church gouernment, is the Lordshipp of Christ in the communion of his offices: whereby his people obey to his will, and haue mutual use of their graces and callings, to further their godlines and welfare.

36. Howe must the churche be first planted and gathered vnder one kinde of gouernement?

First by a couenant and condicion, made on Gods behalfe.

Secondlie by a couenant and condicion made on our behalfe.

Thirdlie by vsing the sacrament of Baptisme to seale those condicions, and couenants.

The couenant on Gods behalf is his agreement or partaking of condicions with vs that if we keepe his lawes, not forsaking his gouernment, hee will take vs for his people, & blesse vs accordingly. . . .

37. His promise to his church, is his sure couenant, remembered, taught, and held by the church, and the seede thereof: whereby it onely hath assurance of saluation in Christ.

The spirit of God in vs, is an inwarde working of the holy Ghost in our hartes, stirring and drawing vs to take Christe for our Saviour, and preparing and stregthning vs vnto all goodnes.

38. What is the covenant or condicion on our behalfe?

We must offer and geue vp our selues to be of the church and people of God.

We must likewise offer and geue vp our children and others being vnder age, if they be of our householde and we haue full power ouer them.

We must make profession, that we are his people, by submitting our selues to his lawes and gouernement. . . .

38. The couenaunt on our behalfe, is our agreement and partaking of conditions with God, that he shalbe our God so long, as wee keepe vnder his gouernement, and obey his lawes, and no longer.

The giuing vp of our selues and our seede to be of the church, is a duetifulnes in seeking holines and hapines by Christe, in his Church, which onely we haue, by a couenaunt to be vnder his gouernement in the Church, and by obeying thereto.

Our profession and submission to his lawes & gouernement, is the keeping of our couenant, by leading

a godly and Christian life.[8]

Here are characteristic points which we will find being carried through the subsequent history of Independent-Congregational thought on the covenant in the Dissenting Brethren's writings, in the writings of the Restoration leader of Congregationalism, John Owen, and in the writings of the Dissenting Brethren's New England allies.

First there is the point about the true church being gathered out of the corrupt remains of the larger body of the church (parish church or National Church) which others--Anglicans and Presbyterian Puritans--call the church. This the Separatists emphasized; but the later classical Independents never ceased to affirm it too. They simply disagreed that the parish assemblies of the Church of England were utterly corrupt, and therefore to be avoided altogether.

Next there is the affirmation of the direct Lordship of Christ over his church, exercised through its officers, who guide the people to obey Christ's will. This is a continuous Independent point. Rule is not by a hierarchy, be it of Bishops or Elders in presbytery and a general assembly. Rather, rule is exercised over his particular visible Congregational church by Christ directly.

A church--the church in Congregational thought-- is,

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[8]Albert Peel and Leland H. Carlson, eds., The Writings of Robert Harrison and Robert Browne (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1953), pp. 252-57.

Browne writes, gathered and provided a government first by a covenant between God and man. The church covenant is central to the very founding of the church. God promises to be with his people for salvation purposes; and the people promise to be his people. This is done by promising to submit to God's laws and government. We shall find the Dissenting Brethren and their allies making a great deal of this, under the heading of the "rule" of the church. The church member covenants not only to enter into obligation to God through mutual righteous relations with his neighbors in the congregation, he agrees also to humbly submit to the censure of the congregation--performed through its Elders--when such a congregation deems the procedure necessary.

Similarly, Henry Barrow explains the nature of the "visible church" and the relationship of the covenant to it in A True Description Out of the Word of God, of the Visible Church:

> As there is but one God and father of all, one Lorde over all, and one spirit: so is there but one trueth, one faith, one salvation, one church, called in one hope, joyned in one profession, guided by one rule, even the word of the most high.
>
> This church as it is universallie understood, conteyneth in it all the elect of God that have bin, are, or shalbe. But being considered more particularlie, as it is seene in this present worlde, it consisteth of a companie and fellowship of faithful and holie people gathered (togither) in the name of Christ Jesus, their only king, priest, and prophet, worshipping him aright, being peaceablie and quietlie governed by his officers and lawes, keeping the unitie of faith in the bonde of peace and love unfained.
>
> Most joyfull, excellent, and glorious things are everie where in the Scriptures spoken of this church. It is called the citie, house, temple, and mountaine of the eternall God: the chosen generation, the holie nation, the peculiar people, the vineyarde, the garden

> enclosed, the spring shut up, the sealed fountaine, the orchyard of pomgranades with sweete fruites, the heritage, the kingdome of Christ: yea his sister, his love, his spouse, his queene, and his bodie, the joye of the whole earth. To this societie is the covenant and all the promises made of peace, of love, and of salvation, of the presence of God, of his graces, of his power, and of his protection.[9]

Here the church is spoken of as the universal company of the elect, and a particular visible congregation. This distinction we shall find recurring in Congregational thought, a distinction between the church as mystical body of Christ, the church invisible, and the church as particular congregations of faithful people. The latter is seen to be the only valid form of the visible church. It participates in the invisible mystical body. What is said in the Scripture about the church may apply to either of these levels or manifestations, but to no other presumed form of the church.

And further, in the True Confession of the Faith, . . . of the London-Amsterdam church (1596), we find these statements on the covenant:

> That to this Church hee hath made the promises, and giuen the seales of his Covenant, presence, loue, blessing and protection: Heere are the holy Oracles as in the side of the Arke, suerly kept & puerly taught. Heere are all the fountaynes and springs of his grace continually replenished and flowing forth. Heere is hee lyfted vp to all Nations, hither hee inuiteth all mē to his supper, his mariage feast; hither ought all men of all estates and degrees that acknowledg him their Prophet, Priest and King to repayre, to bee enrolled emongst his household seruants, to bee vnder his heauenly conduct and government, to leade their lyues in his walled

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[9]Leland H. Carlson, ed., The Writings of Henry Barrow: 1587-1590 (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1962), pp. 214-16.

> sheepfold, & watered orchard, to haue communion heere with the Saincts, that they may bee made meet to bee partakers of their inheritāce in the kingdome of God[10]

And:

> That beeing come forth of this antichristian estate vnto the freedom and true profession of Christ, besides the instructing and vvell guyding of their ovvn Families, they are vvillingly to ioyne together in christian communion and orderly couenant, and by confession of Faith and obedience of Christ, to vnite themselues into peculiar Congregatiōs; vvherin, as members of one body vvherof Christ is the only head, they are to vvorship and serue God according to his vvord, remembring to keep holy the Lords day.[11]

Here is emphasized the nature of covenanting together as an act of obedience to Christ. This we will find to be a recurring Independent-Congregational criticism of the Presbyterian-leaning Puritans--that they say many of the right things about the necessity for continuing Reformation in the church in England, but stop short of that act of radical obedience implied in their protestation, namely the formation of gathered churches of like-minded "saints." Here too we see reflected in a particularly vivid manner that high optimism which the Independent-Congregational branch of Puritanism felt about the possibilities for attaining virtual perfection in love in the context of the mutual relations of the members

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[10] [Henry Ainsworth], A True Confession of the Faith, and Humble Acknowledgment of the Alegeance, which wee hir Majesties Subjects, falsely called Brownists, doo hould towards God, and yield to hir Majestie and all other that are over us in the Lord . . . (1596); also reproduced in Walker, pp. 64-65.

[11] Ibid., p. 69.

of the covenanted congregation--once the poison given off by "scandalous" persons had been excluded from the fellowship. One who as a prelude to Methodist ordination must still in the twentieth century answer affirmatively when his bishop inquires ritually whether he expects to attain perfection in love in this life will have before him a faint echo of the Separatist-Congregational-Puritan spirit here, which in fact the brothers Wesley did inherit from their nonconformist grandparents.

From these documents, then, we may glean the intelligence that for the Separatist-Congregational tradition the church, the actual visible church, the "political" or institutional church, consists in a gathered congregation of self-professed elect, and that the church covenant--the Congregational tradition's specific appropriation of the general Puritan idea of the Covenant of Grace--becomes the organizing principle of congregational life. Nuttall makes the interesting observation that the Savoy Declaration of 1658 denied the very existence of the universal or Catholic Church in a "political" or institutional sense.[12] And M. Dorothea Jordan, in an article entitled "The Early Independents and the Visible Church,"[13] speaks of the "High-Church"

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[12]Geoffrey F. Nuttall, Visible Saints: The Congregational Way: 1640-1660 (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957), pp. 65-66.

[13]Congregational Historical Society Transactions, 2 installments, VIII (Oct., 1922; Oct., 1923), 258-66; 296-305.

character of early English Independency, citing specifically Browne, Barrow, Greenwood, Smyth, Helwys, Johnson, and Ainsworth.[14] "The Church was to them the visible kingdom, apart from its Divinely directed discipline, there was no promise of salvation, no certain path to heaven."[15] "So far from tending to conceive of the Christian life as a life of communion with Christ apart from the church, they inclined to think of the church as speaking with the voice of Christ, and possessing the authority of Christ, in its dealings with its members."[16]

> With a sense of infinite refreshment and relief the Separatists turned from the depressing spectacle of the State Church to contemplate 'the true visible Church, which,' said Smyth, 'is the temple of God, II Corinthians 6:16' and 'consisteth of a holy people which must come out from the unrighteous and unbelievers that are Belial even without the yoke of the Lord's ordinances, and must be a separated people.' The act by which the separation was made was the taking of a solemn covenant to walk TOGETHER in the ways of the Lord; the yoke which every individual member of the Church bore was the yoke of subjection to the admonitions of his fellow-members, gathered together in Church meetings. Church fellowship was to these men and women an intensely precious thing, without which the leading of a full Christian life was impossible.[17]

Miss Jordan's point is particularly borne out by the quotation from Barrow's True Description out of the Word of God of the Visible Church. It is equally true--the emphasis upon separation excepted--for seventeenth-century Independency and Congregationalism, as we shall see.

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[14] Ibid., p. 259.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid., p. 258.

[17] Ibid., pp. 263-64.

Geoffrey F. Nuttall, in an article entitled "The Early Congregational Conception of the Church,"[18] wrote in a similar vein:

> What, then are the implications of the early Congregational conception of the church as constituted by voluntary covenant?[19]
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> . . . . . .
>
> To recapitulate: the self authenticating power of Scripture by its own intrinsic witness, the gathering together of those converted to form a church, the secondary position of the minister, the encouragement of preaching by laymen and even by women, the ability to dispense, at least temporarily, with the sacraments--these things which are characteristic of early Congregationalism are all dependent on a firm faith in the present and living power of the Holy Spirit in experience.[20]

The congregations of gathered scriptural saints, presumed to be imbued with the Spirit whose inspiration makes possible the kind of freedom and fellowship of which Nuttall speaks, organize themselves and hold themselves together through the individual members' adherence to the Covenant of Grace as expressed in the words of the local church covenant. This, rather than baptism, is the principal "sacramental" act of the congregation. Baptism, as we have seen in the quotation from Browne's A Book Which Sheweth . . . ,[21] is simply an outward seal of the covenant already made.

Some of the Separatist brethren, however, came to

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[18]Congregational Historical Society Transactions, XIV (May, 1944), 197-204.

[19]Ibid., p. 199.

[20]Ibid., p. 203.

[21]Above, pp. 26-27.

understand baptism in a more important light, and although they still made use of church covenants, proceeded to make baptism the organizing principle of their congregations, rather than the covenants themselves. Champlin Burrage wrote in his The Church Covenant Idea: Its Origin and Its Development:

> One point is clear, namely, that from 1611 at least Murton and Helwys emphasized repentance, faith, and especially baptism as the means of 'gathering' or organizing a Christian church. It would also appear that even from 1608 or 1609 they held this view with Smyth, and had formed their first church by baptism, though . . . they probably made also covenant promises. But after Smyth and his followers had been driven out, Helwys and Murton evidently continued to modify their opinion till the idea of a church covenant became of no importance.[22]

Thus was an important schism created early in the Separatist-Independent ranks over the position of the covenant in the life of the church and its relation to baptism.

Finally, having considered the position of the covenant theology in the Separatist-Independent-Congregational tradition from several perspectives, emphasizing the thought of the Elizabethan Separatists, I close this chapter with a recorded testimony from the history of Independency in an era well past the Elizabethan age, and in a time when even Nuttall would allow us to consider anyone who speaks for the tradition to be speaking definitely within the bounds of what could properly be considered "Congregationalism." This gives us

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[22](Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1904), pp. 77-78.

to understand that the covenant idea by no means died out in the developing life of Independency. We now hear from William Rathband, in A Brief Narration of Some Church Courses:

> 'And thus they /the Independents or Congregationalists/ define it. Its a solemne and publicke Promise before the Lord and his people, whereby a companie of Christians called (by the power and mercie of God) to the fellowship of Christ, and (by his providence) to dwell together in the unitie of faith and brotherly love, and desirous to partake (according to the will of God) in all the holy Ordinances of God together in one Congregation, doe bind themselves to the Lord to walke in such wayes of holy worship to him, and of edification one towards another, as God himselfe hath required in his word of every Church of Christ and the members thereof.'[23]

Binding together in such fashion is a scriptural requirement for every true church, according to this interpretation. This involves the assertion of the necessity of an explicit and specific church covenant, rather than simply an implicit covenant understanding which, as we have seen earlier, the Presbyterian-leaning Puritans were generally satisfied was sufficient. A contemporaneous discussion of the differences between explicit and implicit covenants may be found, for instance, in Thomas Hooker's A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline. Wherein, the Way of the Churches of New-England Is Warranted out of the Word (1648).[24]

We proceed now to a consideration of specific church covenants, and the churches which held them, in the Separatist-Congregational tradition.

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[23]London, 1644, as quoted in Burrage, The Church Covenant . . . , p. 111.

[24]As quoted in Ibid., pp. 105-06.

CHAPTER III

EARLY INDEPENDENT CONGREGATIONS AND THEIR COVENANTS

A. C. McGiffert, in his Protestant Thought before Kant, makes the categorical statement that "Browne's theory of the Church was that of the Continental Anabaptists. The Church is a community of saints constituted by a voluntary covenant taken by Christian believers with God and with each other."[1] He goes on to say that "Browne followed the Anabaptists in insisting upon strict discipline. Here he was at one with Calvin and the Puritans in general."[2] Even the "independence of the local church" McGiffert claims Browne took from the Anabaptists.[3] Only at the point of baptism itself does McGiffert see Browne deviating from his supposed Anabaptist mentors.[4]

McGiffert goes further than most interpreters in seeing direct Anabaptist influence on Browne's church-covenant theology. At no point does he actually trace Browne's thought to the Continental Anabaptists in any concrete way. That is, he

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[1](New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962; first pub. 1911), p. 130.

[2]Ibid., p. 133.

[3]Ibid., p. 134.

[4]Ibid., p. 135.

does not document his further assertion that "Browne and his early followers agreed with the Anabaptists, whose principles they had largely adopted."[5] Others, notably Champlin Burrage, are willing to see a certain parallelism between the Anabaptists and the Brownists on the point. Burrage says that the Scottish covenant tradition and the Anabaptist covenants form the thought-pattern for Brownist covenants, but that the latter are not directly descended from either.[6]

The possible relationship between Anabaptist and Separatist church covenants is, then, one of the problems we encounter in a perusal of specific early Independent covenants. Another is the matter of just which congregations may be considered to be the first authentic Congregational-type organizations. This leads us to the Plumbers' Hall congregation and Richard Fitz.[7]

In 1567 members of a congregation at Plumbers' Hall in

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[5] Ibid.

[6] Burrage, The Church Covenant . . . , Vol. I, Chaps. I-III, esp. pp. 27, 97-98. Burrage also points out that "the word Anabaptist even in these early times was evidently employed as a generic term to designate separatists, or indeed a person of irregular or fanatical religious opinions." (Vol. I, p. 44)

[7] While the Strangers' Church in Edward VI's reign, and secretive Prayerbook-using groups in London during Mary's reign, plus the exiled congregations at Frankfort, Zurich, and Geneva, may all of practical necessity have assumed something of the aspect of Independent-Congregational gatherings, this was not their ultimate intention or their final destiny; so they will not be considered here as part of our story.

London were arrested and examined before Archbishop Grindal.[8] Grindal wrote to Bullinger to the effect that "some have separated from us."[9] One Richard Fitz was found to be a minister of the group.[10] Peel says that Fitz's congregation and one or two others were the earliest Congregational churches.[11] Waddington said that Fitz actually led a group separate from the Plumbers' Hall Society; Powicke and Dale said that they were one and the same group.[12] Burrage distinguishes them, both as groups and as to type, writing as follows:

> To Grindal, indeed, Puritan independency must have seemed as near a state of separation as he could well imagine, but in the light of all the facts known to-day it is sufficiently evident that the Plumbers' Hall congregation, as a whole, was in reality only an independent Puritan congregation modelled after the London Nonconformist congregation of Queen Mary's days, which did not separate from the Church of England as a State Church but merely from Roman Catholicism in the Church. Further this Plumbers' Hall congregation of 1567, it will be noticed, used the Geneva Order of service, as a congregation in Queen Mary's time had used the second Prayer Book of Edward VI, and therefore like [sic] it was not a congregational, or separatist, church in the modern sense.[13]

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[8]Champlin Burrage, The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research (2 vols.; Cambridge: The University Press, 1912), Vol. I, p. 80.

[9]Zurich Letters, as quoted in ibid., pp. 80-81.

[10]Albert Peel, A Brief History of English Congregationalism (London: Independent Press, Ltd., 1931), p. 30.

[11]Ibid., p. 31.

[12]Burrage, Early English Dissenters . . . , Vol. I, p. 82.

[13]Ibid., p. 84.

"My present impression [Burrage says] is that even in 1567 Fitz's church was separatist, and distinct from the Plumbers' Hall company."[14] Burrage then mentions that Fitz's "Privy church" had a kind of church covenant, though the term was not used, but that it was not, as Dale claimed, the first "regularly constituted Congregational Church." Rather, it was a step in the evolution of such. It was separatist more by force of circumstances than by intention, and Congregational by accident. Its ideal was a national Church, led by the Queen, purified of popery, and steeped in "the purity and truth of the apostolic church."[15]

Albert Peel takes a more positive stance with regard to the full Congregationalism of Fitz's church. He also disagrees about the Plumbers' Hall Society. Burrage's argument that the Plumbers' Hall congregation was not really Separatist is "surely a refinement of controversy," he thinks. It was Separatist in practice, not a congregational church as such, but Separatist nonetheless.[16] Burrage seems to admit this much himself, at least implicitly, in the above quotation. The "covenant" of Fitz's congregation reproduced in Volume II of Burrage is not as complete, Peel points out, as that version in Strype, which has a paragraph that Burrage does not include.

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[14] Ibid., p. 86.

[15] Ibid., pp. 91-93.

[16] Albert Peel, The First Congregational Churches (Cambridge; The University Press, 1920), p. 13.

I have examined both versions, and find that the additional paragraph does indeed clearly set forth the essential spirit of early Congregational church organization, and--if accurately and authentically reproduced by Strype--undermines Burrage's contention in The Church Covenant Idea that Robert Browne's church at Norwich produced the first known regulation church covenant in England.[17] There was, then, an institutional Congregationalism--though less clearly defined, to be sure--in existence before Browne's church was organized in 1580/81.[18]

The paragraph in the Strype version of Fitz's congregational covenant not included in Burrage reads as follows:

> Moreover, I have now joined myself to the Church of Christ. Wherein I have yielded myself subject to the discipline of God's word, as I promised at my baptism. Which, if I should now again forsake, and join myself with their traditions, I should forsake the union, wherein I am knit to the body of Christ, and join myself to the discipline of Antichrist. For in the church of the traditioners, there is no other discipline than that which hath been maintained by the Antichristian Pope of Rome; whereby the Church of God hath always been afflicted, and is until this day. For the which cause I refuse them.[19]

The word "covenant" is, admittedly, not here; but the intention of covenanting together to form a church shines clearly through the paragraph.

Having now given attention to the origins of the church

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[17] Ibid., p. 38.

[18] Ibid., p. 40.

[19] John Strype, The Life and Acts of Matthew Parker, Vol. II (Oxford, 1821), pp. 283-85.

covenant practice in Independency, both with regard to the possible Scottish and Anabaptist backgrounds[20] and the case of the first Congregational-type church organization to be centered around a covenant as organizing principle, we now turn to those cases wherein there is no question that congregations were formed around an explicit covenant.

J. Morgan Jones, in an article entitled "The Church Covenant in Independency," makes this point:

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[20]See above pp. 24-25 and 37 for mention of the Scottish background. The Scottish National Covenant (1638) and the Solemn League and Covenant (1643) were pacts setting forth mutual relations in the light of the Puritan faith, to be sure. The mutual relations were between citizens of whole nations, however, with definite political and military implications; and while certainly group commitments, they did not imply the same kinds of personal obligations for mutual upbuilding in the faith that Congregational covenants did. They were not focal points for a way of life in day-to-day relations as were Congregational covenants. So while they are roughly analogous, the national-type covenants and the Congregational covenants are not simply the same thing on different levels. Congregational covenants represent a qualitatively different extension of the covenant idea.

I do not mean, of course, to belittle the Scottish covenant tradition, which Masson says "had been a grand agency in Scottish History." (Masson, Vol. III, p. 9) Rather, I mean simply to point out that it is a different kind of covenant tradition than that with which we are primarily concerned in this study. The Scottish National Covenant, Masson reminds us, was to the Scots in the seventeenth century the cause of the "liberation of Scotland, [and] the destruction of Episcopacy root and branch within its borders." (Vol. III, p. 9) And the Solemn League and Covenant was a pact to, in its own words, "bring the Churches of God in the three Kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in Religion, Confession of Faith, Form of Church Government, Directory for Worship and Catechising, that we and our posterity after us may, as brethren, live in faith and love, and the Lord may delight to dwell in the midst of us." (quoted in Masson, Vol. III, pp. 13-14)

> By today, enough incontestable proofs have been discovered of the fact that one of the characteristics distinguishing our earliest Independent and Congregational Churches from every other body of religious people, the special peculiarity of their life and character, was that, without exception, they were founded on and through a Church Covenant of an exceptional and remarkable nature. It is true that they were not the first to discover the idea of a Church Covenant as a bond of union and communion; but in their origin and early history, the Church Covenant was raised to honour and influence. They made it the center of the life of the Church. Above all, their Covenant bears upon it a sufficiently distinctive stamp to make it a new thing in the history of the world.[21]

Jones quotes from six representative Independent covenants, those of Norwich (1581), Gainsborough and Scrooby (1602), Southwark (1616), Yarmouth (1642), Bury St. Edmunds (1646), and Denton (1676). And he finds four factors common to all: (1) "A voluntary Covenant as a foundation of the Church," (2) "The Christian experience and the moral life as the aim of the Church," (3) "Christ as the standard, as the authority and Head of the Church," and (4) "Freedom of thought and conscience as the condition of the Church's continuance."[22]

The Norwich church (Robert Browne's), the Gainsborough and Scrooby churches, and the Southwark church (Henry Jacob's) all existed in the period of Separatism-Independency's early history. It will be instructive, then, to give attention to the wording of their covenants, and compare them with the wording of later Congregational covenants, to see if the earlier

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[21]Congregational Historical Society Transactions, XVI (December, 1949), 52-63.

[22]Ibid., pp. 54-56.

and later churches in the movement were organized in quite similar fashion. For if this should prove to be the case, it will be one more verification of the contention that Congregationalism, from the standpoint of its basic ideas about the nature of the church, demonstrates a continuity in its history from its earliest beginnings through its classical period of developing denominational self-consciousness. In his article which we have been considering, Jones makes no distinction between earlier and later Congregationalism, or between Separatism and Independency. He sees the four common characteristics which he points up as running right through all six examples.

Excerpts from the three earlier covenants which Jones mentions read as follows:

Norwich:

> 'A Covenant was made, and all agreed individually to cleave faithfully to one another. The first thing that was done was to agree voluntarily to cleave together to the Lord in one Covenant and Communion, and to keep and seek union with one another under His laws and His rule.'

Gainsborough and Scrooby:

> 'As the free people of the Lord they agree with one another as a Church in the fellowship of the Gospel and in Covenant with God to walk in all His ways as it had been revealed to them already or would be revealed to them in time to come, to the limit of their power, cost what it may to them.'

Southwark:

> 'And they standing in a circle hand in hand made a serious Covenant with one another in the presence of Almighty God to walk together in all His ways so far as

> He has revealed them hitherto or will reveal them further.'[23]

We have available longer examples of the later Congregational church covenants, from approximately twenty pages of examples which Burrage has furnished in The Church Covenant Idea. I shall here reproduce from Burrage the covenants of Yarmouth (1643--Jones says 1642), Norwich (1644--the later Congregational church there, not Browne's church), Bury St. Edmunds (1646), and Woodbridge (1651). These examples should provide ample demonstration of the actual nature of the church covenant as it operated in early Congregationalism. It is apparent to this writer from reading these covenants and others which Burrage provides that if there is a difference from the earlier covenants, it is only in degree of complexity and not in kind or even quality.

The covenants mentioned follow:

Yarmouth:

> 'It is manifest by Gods word, That God alwaies was pleased to walke in a way of Couenant with his people he promising to be their God & they promising to be his people separated from the world & the pollutions thereof as may appeare Deut. 29. 10, 11 & c. Isai. 56. 3 & c. Act 5. 13, 14 & c.
>
> Wee therefore whose names are underwritten being desirous, in the feare of God to worship & serue him according to his reuealed will doe freely, solemnely, & jointly Couenant with the Lord in the presence of his Saints & Angels.

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[23] Ibid. A much more complete and extended version of the Norwich covenanting together is given in "The Order Agreed on for the Givding & establishing of the companie in all Godlines, & such like," in Peel and Carlson, eds., The Writings of . . . Harrison and . . . Browne, pp. 422-24.

1. That we will for euer acknowledge & auouch God for our God in Christ Jesus.

2. That we will alwaies endeauour through the grace of God assisting us to walke in all his waies & ordinances according to his written word, which is the onely sufficient rule of good life for euery man, neither will we suffer our selues to be polluted by any sinfull waies either publike or priuate but abstaine from the uery appearance of euill, giuing no offence to the Jew or Gentile, or Churches of Christ.

3. That we will in all loue improue our Communion as brethren by watching ouer one another, & as neede shalbe, counsell, admonish, reproue, comfort, releeue, assist & beare with one another, humbly submitting our selues to the gouernment of Christ in his Churches.

4. Lastly we doe not promise these things in our owne, but in Christ's strength neither doe we confine ourselues to the words of this Couenant but shall at all times account it our duty to embrace any further light or trueth which shalbe reuealed to us out of God's word.'[24]

Norwich:

'It is manifest by God's word that God alwaies was pleased to walke in a way of Couenant with his people Knit together in a visible Church estate; he promising to be their God & they promising to be his people separated from the world & the pollutions thereof as may appeare therein.

We therefore whose names are subscribed being desirous (in the feare of God) to worship & serue him according to his reuealed will, & beleeuing it to be our duty to walke in a way of Church couenant, doe freely & solemnly Couenant with the Lord & one another in the presence of his saints and Angells.

1. That we will for euer acknowledge and auouch the Lord to be our God in Christ Jesus giuing up our selves to him to be his people.

2. That we will alwaies endeauour through the grace of God assisting us to walke in all his waies & ordinances according to his written word which is the onely sufficient rule of good life for euery man. Neither will we suffer our selues to be polluted by our sinful waies either publike or preuate, but endeauor to abstaine from the very appearance of euill, giuing no offence to

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[24]Burrage, The Church Covenant . . . , p. 129.

the Jew or Gentile or the Churches of Christ. . . .'[25]

Edmonsbury:

> 'Be it knowne vnto all the saints of Sion that wee whose names are vnderwritten knowing that there is but one eternall God, Creater and Gouernour of all things, distinguished into three w^{ch} beare record in heauen. . . . And wee seing not only the necessity of this Separation, but also the great need of continuing in Christian fellowship and Societie, and that to be of y^{e} visible particular Church of Christ is most needfull for the Saints edification in this life it being y^{e} exelentest Kingdome of grace, wherby they may enioy all the ordinances of God, according to their capabillity. And seing that there is no such particular Church visible neer vnto vs but so remote that wee canot without breach of the Saboth assemble with, ... And considering that God alowes of Particular Churches in one Nation, And wee his Saints being possessed with the thoughts of y^{e} exelencie therof, and the sweete-closing-neer-communion which the Saints of God haue with Christ therin, Wee, in the Presence of y^{e} greate God, whose glorious fulness the heauen, and y^{e} heauen of heauens canot containe. Wee doe therefore, together with our posteritie, Couenant, to become a peculiar Temple for the Holy Ghoste to dwell in, an entier spouse of Jesus Christ our Lord of glory, for y^{e} enioyment of all his holy ordinances, according to his owne institutions, and so to walke in all his waies so far as he hath reueiled vnto vs, or shall reueile hearafter. . . .'[26]

Woodbridge:

> '1 We do profess before y^{e} Lord, this day, that He is our God, whom we haue chosen, to whom we are joyned, upon whose Covenant we take hold for y^{t} we want, to whom

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[25] Ibid., p. 130. The covenant, completed in three more paragraphs, continues to be almost identical with that of Yarmouth, indicating, certainly, close collaboration between these "Independent" churches. Independency did not mean isolation from other churches, from fraternal communion and fellowship. We shall find the Dissenting Brethren making this point strongly.

[26] Ibid., p. 131. The deletions are Burrage's, with the exception of the final one, which is mine. One may note in this covenant particularly the strong remnant of separatist feeling which lingered on into the seventeenth century in some portions of classical Congregationalism.

also we giue up our Selves according to that Covenant, and all yt we haue.

2 We do, and will (in ye power of his Spirit) receive Iesus Christ our King, Priest & Prophet, depending upon him for Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification & Redemption yt glorying we may glory in ye Lord.

3 We will, through Grace, Endeavour to Know ye Scriptures more fully, which onely are able to make us wise unto Salvation, that we may embrace all ye promises, obey all ye precepts walk in all ye Ways laid out for us therein, being led by ye Spirit, and living, and walking in Him.

4 We freely and chearfully give up ourselves each to other to become one lump, & one stick in the Lord's hand, and will (the Lord assisting us) submit our selves one to another in ye fear of God; watch over one another, and doing all things becoming those of the same Body, and whose Heart is one, & Way one in ye Lord.

5 We will (the Lord helping us) Endeavour to keep Unity of ye Spirit in ye Bond of Peace, doing nothing through Strife or Vain glory, but following after things that make for Quiet, and things wherein one may Edify another.

6 We will (in Power received from on high) hold fast what we haue received till ye Lord come, obeying our Governours, in Him, pleasing our Neighbours in Him, instructing our Children in the Knowledg of his Will, observing all the laws of his House, the Laws of ye Sabbath, Prayer, Fasting, and Thanksgiving, hearing our great Prophet in all things, walking after Him, that we may give no Offense to Jew or Gentile, nor to ye Church of Christ; but may Exercise our selves unto Godliness, which hath the Promise of this Life, and of that also which is to come.'[27]

In the three early covenants just quoted, the one central point is mutual relations, that is the agreement or promise before God and to God and each other to "walk" (as the Puritans put it) in righteousness together, following the revealed commandments of Christ. Christ's "rule" in the congregation is also mentioned explicitly.

These later covenants also make this the central factor

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[27] Ibid., pp. 133-34.

of joining together in this manner. There is added a prefatory remark pointing out God's initiative in the covenant process, that is in setting up the Covenant of Grace upon which the individual church covenants are based.

What is added, then, in these later covenants is a series of paragraphs, or sentences, depending on the particular covenant, spelling out the nature of the special relations involved. These have to do primarily with the obligation to live a blameless and loving existence with other members of the congregation.

PART II. THE DISSENTING BRETHREN IN HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

CHAPTER IV

THE EARLY YEARS OF THE CONGREGATIONAL MOVEMENT

Various persons in the history of England have at one time or another been dubbed the "Father of Nonconformity." Wycliffe, Bishop Hooper, Robert Browne, John Robinson, Henry Jacob, and Richard Baxter come to mind immediately as active contestants for the title. Robert Browne's claim to the title rests, among other considerations, upon the fact that he was the author of probably the first major programmatic separatist essay, namely, A Treatise of Reformation Without Tarying for Anie (1582). But, alas, he defected, and did at least outward obeisance to the mother Church after 1585. This fact, combined with the political odium which came to surround the designation "Brownists," led later Separatists and Independents to vigorously disclaim him. Thus we find the 1596 manifesto of the London-Amsterdam church, the church of Greenwood, Johnson, Ainsworth, etc., being entitled A True Confession of the Faith, and hvmble acknovvledgment of the alegeance, vvhich vvee hir Maiesties Subjects, falsely called Brovvnists, doo hould tovvards God, and yield to hir Majestie and all other that are ouer vs in the Lord.[1]

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[1]See n. 9, Chap. II, also Walker, p. 49.

Williston Walker, however, considers Robert Browne to be "the father of modern Congregationalism."[2] He makes the point that Browne's A Book Which Sheweth the Life and Manners of All True Christians . . . (1582) is the first systematic exposition of Congregationalism.[3] And Frederick J. Powicke writes:

> Brownism . . . became the accepted platform of all the early Separatists. Younger leaders like Henry Barrow, John Greenwood, Francis Johnson, and Henry Ainsworth may have varied the emphasis, cleared away ambiguities, or given to this or that principle a more vigorous and detailed application; but, notwithstanding their vehement desire to repudiate all connexion with Browne or his name, it could not reasonably be denied that he was 'the shop of their store and steel of their strength.' Proof of this lies to hand in their writings, particularly in a series of authoritative documents which they issued for the chief Separatist Church during the first twenty years of its existence. Only on one point of importance has there seemed room for doubt. . . . This point is the eldership and its relation to the Church.[4]

And Powicke continues:

> Stripped of its harshest features,[5] [Brownism] was accepted from the hands of John Robinson by Henry

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[2]Williston Walker, A History of the Congregational Churches in the United States (New York: The Christian Literature Co., p. 30.

[3]Ibid., p. 38.

[4]Frederick J. Powicke, "Brownism," Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, II, 877.

[5]Brownism's "harshest features" were its tendency toward self-righteous exclusivism, its propensity for condemnation out-of-hand of every other form of churchmanship, and the ease with which even members of the little elect communities of saints quarrelled among themselves over very petty points of disagreement.

> Jacob (1563?-1624),[6] who, 'gathered' at least some of the scattered 'remnants' of the London congregation of 1592 and organized (on a semi-Separatist basis) what has been called the first distinctively Independent Church in England. . . . /And/ on the whole, it may be said that Brownism has survived only on its nobler side; and that its essential witness has been continued and fulfilled in the principles which give life and power to modern Congregationalism.[7]

However, on the technical point of the one to whom founder's honors are to be distributed, Powicke had said this thirteen years earlier with regard to Barrow: ". . . he, rather than Robert Browne and John Robinson, deserves to be named emphatically the founder of English Congregationalism."[8] Be this as it may, Powicke in any case keeps the honor within the Separatist family, and thus argues for a direct line of intellectual succession from Separatism to and through Congregationalism. And Henry W. Clark does virtually the same thing by characterizing Browne as "the first man who survived in history as the advocate of anything like a systematic Independency."[9]

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[6]Robert Paul, following Champlin Burrage and Perry Miller at least part way, says the reverse is true. See Paul, An Apologeticall Narration, p. 64, n. 18; and "Henry Jacob and Seventeenth-Century Puritanism: III, Jacob and Robinson," Historical Commission of the United Church of Christ Newsletter, I (November, 1966).

[7]Powicke, Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, II, 878.

[8]Frederick J. Powicke, Henry Barrow: Separatist (1550?-1593) and the Exiled Church of Amsterdam (London: James Clarke & Co., 1900), p. vii.

[9]Henry W. Clark, History of English Nonconformity: from Wiclif to the Close of the Nineteenth Century, Vol. I: From Wiclif to the Restoration (London: Chapman & Hall, Ltd., 1911), p. 177.

Perry Miller labels the Independency of Henry Jacob (and also Robert Parker (d. 1617), William Bradshaw (d. 1618), Paul Baynes (d. 1617), and William Ames (d. 1633)) as "Non-Separatist Congregationalism," rather than "semi-Separatist," as Powicke has done. Calling attention to this difference may seem an unnecessary playing with words and no real distinction, but there does seem to be a real difference in emphasis between Powicke and Miller. For while Powicke would see a virtual continuity between sixteenth-century Separatism and early seventeenth-century Independency as exemplified by Jacob's group at Southwark in 1616, Miller sees a definite, if thin, dividing line. He writes, in Orthodoxy in Massachusetts:

> There can be little doubt that these men were Congregationalists. But there can be also no doubt that though their discipline was the same as that of the Separatists, and though they were just as much opposed to Presbyterianism, they were not themselves Separatists. They would admit being the 'rigidest sort of Puritans,' but nothing more. Jacob, recognizing the similarity of his program with the polity of the Separatists, could say that he did not regard them as 'being so evill as commonly they are held to be,' but as for himself, 'I never was, nor am, separated from all public communion with the congregations of England.' 'The Lord knoweth there is none in England more unwilling to runne vpon this rocke then I.' Even when in 1616 he set up a Congregational church in Southwark, the group protested that they 'never intended separation from the Church of England.'[10]

One of the differences in interpretation here seems to be that Miller is taking the Independents at their word as

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[10]Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959; first pub. 1933), p. 81.

to their intentions, and equating the intentions with the fact of the matter, while Powicke stresses more the actual existence of virtually Separatist congregations at Southwark and elsewhere going under the name of Independency. Henry Martyn Dexter had referred to the church at Southwark as "the mother-church of the Independent denomination as it now exists."[11] This could, I suppose, be taken either way.

The same track of distinguishing Separatism and Independency had been taken more forcefully than Miller takes it by Champlin Burrage, in his The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research (1550-1641). He contended as follows:

> The beginnings of Independency or Congregationalism, are not, as heretofore, traced to the Brownists or Barrowists, but to the Congregational Puritanism advocated by Henry Jacob and William Bradshaw about 1604 and 1605, and later put in practice by various Puritan congregations on the Continent, whence it was brought to America and back into England. Puritan Congregationalism accordingly did not have its source in separatism, nor was it separatist in spirit, but was constantly declared by its upholders as involving a separation only from the world, and not from the Church of England.[12]

Those who would argue otherwise might well point out that regardless of the most pious intentions on the part of the Independents, "separation from the world" on the English scene in the early seventeenth century did in fact constitute separation from the Church of England!

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[11]Henry Martyn Dexter, The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years as Seen in Its Literature (New York: Harper & Bros., 1880), p. 635.

[12]p. 33.

Robert S. Paul sides with Burrage at this point, saying:

> The point must be conceded. We may criticize some of the details of Burrage's research, or some of his more sweeping contentions, but there seems to be little doubt that he was right in his main thesis that Congregationalism in the early seventeenth century refers specifically to a non-separatist movement within the Puritan wing of the Church of England. However much we may believe that Robert Browne and Elizabethan Separatism quite properly belong to the authentic pre-history of modern Congregationalism, it is to the pre-history that they belong, and they must be clearly distinguished from the Puritans who used the word 'Congregational' to describe their own view of the Church.[13]

Geoffrey F. Nuttall carries the argument pursued by Burrage and Miller a large step further. Not only does he consign the Brownists to the realm of the "pre-history" of Congregationalism,[14] but he says that Jacob and his group (denominated "semi-separatism," in explicit distinction from Miller's "non-separating Congregationalism") are not true Congregationalists either.[15] This judgment is predicated upon the assumption that "the Congregational men," or "the Congregational way," may not be seen by the historian to appear as a definable group until the 1640's.[16]

There are, however, two partial exceptions, in Nuttall's view:

> William Ames, who in his day was a scholar of European fame, and who in 1610 issued Bradshaw's English

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[13]Paul, pp. 63-65.

[14]Nuttall, Visible Saints . . . , p. 8.

[15]Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[16]Ibid., p. 8.

> Puritanisme in a Latin version with a preface of his own, is perhaps the nearest in spirit, as well as in date, to developed Congregationalism.[17]

His works, Nuttall says, "foreshadow Congregational polity."

> The Rotterdam church of which [Hugh] Peter was minister, likewise forms a link with the five men who were to sign the Apologeticall Narration; for it was to that church, from which in 1635 Peter went to New England, that in 1636-8 three of the five, William Bridge, Jeremiah Burroughes and Sidrach Simpson joined themselves, Bridge becoming its pastor and Burroughes its 'teacher', while the other two, Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye, gathered a church at Arnhem in association with the church at Rotterdam.[18]

Whether one is minded to allow to Elizabethan Separatism the technical distinction of constituting the first major step in a long line of Congregational or Independent institutional history, its position as the source of the first major constructions in England of Congregational-type polity and doctrine can hardly be denied. Further, to say that they were a small abortive attempt which died out and left no trace, and then claim that Independency arose virtually de novo, hardly seems reasonable in the light of the complex interconnections between persons and groups in England, Holland, and New England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries which are known to have existed. We may, then, be confident that examples of Separatist writings on the covenant which we have had occasion to examine, and Separatist accounts of the nature of the church (keeping in mind their peculiar stress on separation as a real point of difference), are representative formulations of what we might call the earliest phase

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[17] Ibid., p. 10. [18] Ibid.

of the "Congregational tradition." For it was Robert Browne, after all, who, as Albert Peel tells us, "first clearly expounded the principles of Congregationalism."[19] And it is the idea of Separatist-Congregational Independency as a distinctive type of the church with which we are primarily concerned in this study.[20]

It will be beyond the scope of this study to include biographical information about the leading Separatists and the early seventeenth-century Independents, or detailed information about the history and development of their church organizations. This information is readily available in a wide variety of places,[21] and it will serve no relevant purpose to repeat it in capsule form here. Nor shall we peruse extensively the thought of such transitional figures as Jacob, Bradshaw, and Ames. We have already heard representative statements from Browne, Barrow, and an early exiled church, which connect them conclusively with the genesis of the Congregational idea of the church as a covenanted community of visible saints.[22] Sufficient illustration of the point that

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[19]Peel, A Brief History . . . , p. 34.

[20]See above pp. 25-30 for a discussion of major points of agreement between the earlier Separatist and later Independent-Congregational phases of the movement under discussion here.

[21]The reader is referred, for instance, to the "Select Bibliography" contained in Peel and Carlson, The Writings of . . . Harrison and . . . Browne, pp. 545-56.

[22]Above, pp. 27-32.

there were indeed major figures on the early seventeenth-century scene as well who provide a demonstration of continuity in the history of ideas between Elizabethan Separatism and classical Independency will come to us now out of excerpts from Henry Jacob's Catechism and William Bradshaw's English Puritanisme.

Burrage calls Jacob's Principles & Foundations of Christian Religion . . . "the earliest completely developed Independent or Congregational, Puritan (non-separatist) Catechism in existence."[23] It reads, in part, as follows:

> Question. What is a true Visible or Ministeriall Church of Christ?
> Answer. A true Visible or Ministeriall Church of Christ is a particular Congregation being a spiritual perfect Corporation of Believers, & having power in it selfe immediatly from Christ to administer all Religious meanes of faith to the members thereof.[24]
> Question. How is a Visible Church constituted & gathered?
> Answer. By a free mutuall consent of Believers joyning & covenanting to live as Members of a holy Society together in all religious & vertuous duties as Christ & his Apostles did institute & practise in the Gospell. By such a free mutuall consent also all Civill perfect Corporations did first beginne.
> Question. If every particular Church be an intire Church & independent of any other, how shall Vnitie be preserved & obedience to Magistrats?
> Answer. Vnitie in conscience standeth not vpon one Church or Pastor over the rest, but vpon y^{e} one Word & Testament of Christ taught ordinarily by that Church vnto vs whereof we are; as Gods ordinance is. Also thus

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[23]Burrage, Early English Dissenters . . . , Vol. II, pp. 153ff.

[24]A "ministerial church" in the writings of seventeenth-century Congregationalists was to be distinguished from one depending on "magisterial" power to enforce its authority. The ministerial church relied only upon the moral power inherent in Christ's revealed word, at least in ideal circumstances. See Paul, An Apologeticall Narration, p. 119.

most easily may y^e meanest next dwelling Magistrat rule any Church in outward peace; yea in peace and concord of Religion far more easily & more readily then otherwise. . . .[25]

. . . . . .

Question. Wherein standeth the Churches holy Government[?]

Answer. In their Election of Ministers, & Their Spiritual Correction of offenders.

Question. Is it Christs ordinance y^t y^e whole Church should Elect their Ministers, & Correct their Offenders?

Answer. They are to do no more of necessity, & in their ordinary carriage, but freely to consen[t] to their Guides preparing & directing every matter.

Question. What Ministers ought the Church to chose for her ordinary guidance and government.

Answer. A Pastor or Bishop, with Elders, & Deacons.

Question. What is y^e Pastors Office?

Answer. Gods & in y^e Churches Name to administer the Wo[rd, (?)] the holy Signes, the holy Government, & publik Prayer. Not any one, or so [me?] of these, but all.

Question. What are the Elders?

Answer. The Pastors assistants & coadjutors in y^e holy government.

Question. What are the Deacons?

Answer. They are faithfull men trusted to gather & distribut y^e Church[es?] publik treasure for Ecclesiasticall vses.

Question. Wherein standeth y^e Churches spirituall Correction of Offenders which is properly called the holy Discipline.

Answer. In their Admonishing (twise or thrise at least) & Exhorting to repentance, & y^en in cutting of & Excommunicating y^e vnrepentan[t].[26]

Burrage also writes:

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[25]Burrage, Early English Dissenters . . . , Vol. II, p. 157. It is obvious from this that participation in a "ministerial church" does not preclude calling in the "magistrate" in cases of extreme necessity, to preserve the peace. It will, in fact, be one of the claims of seventeenth-century Congregationalism that its system actually makes this more convenient than does the Presbyterian system. It is the magistrate's involvement in the internal affairs of the church that Congregationalism will not tolerate.

[26]Ibid., pp. 159-60.

One of the first apparently to agree with, and promulgate, the congregational Puritan views of Henry Jacob was William Bradshaw (1571-1618). In 1605 he stated these views with great clearness in an anonymous pamphlet, which, however, is well understood to have been written by him, entitled, 'ENGLISH PVRITANISME/ CONTAINE- /NING. / The maine opinions of the rigidest / sort of those that are called Puritanes / In the Realme of England. . . .'[27]

This tract reads, in part, as follows:

'1 They /the "rigidest sort" of Puritans/ hould and maintaine that every Companie, Congregation or Assemblie of men, ordinarilie ioyneing together in the true worship of God, is a true visible church of Christ. and that the same title is improperlie attributed to other Convocations, Synods /&c/ Societies, combinations, or assemblies whatsoeuer.
'2 They hould that all such Churches or Congregations, communicating after that manner together, in diuine worship are in all Ecclesiasticall matters cquall /equall/, and of the same power and authoritie, and that by the word and will of God they ought to have the same spirituall priuilidges, prerogatius, officers, administrations, orders, and Formes of divine worship.
'3 They hould that Christ Iesus hath not subiected any Church or Congregation of his, to any other superior Ecclesiasticall Iurisdiction, then vnto that which is within it self So that yf a wholl Churche or Congregation shall erre in any matters of faith or religion noe other Churches or Spirituall Church officers haue (by any warrant from the word of God) power to censure, punish, or controule the same: but are onely to counsell and aduise the same, and so to leave their Soules to the immediate Iudgment of Christ, and their bodies to the sword & power of the Ciuill Magistrat, who alone upon Earth hath power to punish a whol Church or Congregation.[28]

About this last paragraph Burrage comments:

In Bradshaw's exaltation of the civil magistrate to the

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[27] Ibid., Vol. I, p. 287.

[28] Pp. 5-6 of the tract; this is also reproduced in ibid., p. 288. Because most of the tract is italicized, I have reversed the usual procedure here, and have underlined only those portions which are not in italics.

> position of chief arbiter in all ecclesiastical matters[29] we see how the Congregational Puritans were planning to deal with the practical problem of abolishing the offices of Archbishop, Bishop, etc., how they would at the same time preserve the Church of England intact as a National Church, and how they would prevent the actual establishment of universal separatism in England, should their ideal be realized.[30]

The same may be said, as I have just pointed out, of remarks in Jacob's Catechism. And indeed, we shall find the Dissenting Brethren following in this line of thinking about the magistrate: reluctantly, in theory only, and then only in cases of extreme necessity, during the 1640's; and positively, in the aiding and abetting of Cromwell's attempted settlement of religion (as, for instance, chaplains to the Council of State, "Triers," and members of a committee to draw up fundamental principles of religion), in the 1650's.

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[29]By "chief arbiter in all ecclesiastical matters" I take Burrage to mean here--in context of the remainder of English Puritanisme, which I have read--something like "court of last resort in extremely difficult cases," rather than "constant mediator in the affairs of the church," as might appear to be the case from the wording of the quotation.

[30]Ibid.

CHAPTER V

THE CAREERS OF THE DISSENTING BRETHREN AND THEIR ALLIES

The Dissenting Brethren follow, as we have now seen, an already full line of traditional Congregational thought in emphasizing a basic Puritan idea of the divine plan of salvation as involving a new covenant relation between man and God in Christ, and the particular Congregational emphasis upon the personal working out of this covenant within the context of a covenanted community of faith which has adopted the proper scripturally-ordained polity. It now becomes our task to set forth their specific thought on the covenant and its implications for church structure. Before we may do that, however, it is necessary to set the Dissenting Brethren within the historical context which we have begun to develop here.

Basic biographical data on the Dissenting Brethren is readily available, and it has been reproduced often. Consequently we shall not dwell upon it for very long. It is important only to reproduce details here sufficient to present a connected and coherent story of events and the ideas associated with the events.

In 1841 an important chronicler of Congregationalism,

Benjamin Hanbury, wrote:

> In this body [the Westminster Assembly], then, of more than a hundred other Divines, were <u>five</u> at the least,--Bridge, Burroughes, Goodwin, Nye, and Simpson,--called henceforward 'the Dissenting Brethren,' whose names will ever stand pre-eminent for their regard for the inalienable rights of conscience; and who contested on behalf of the utmost latitude of religious freedom, and have not only left their joint and separate testimonies, but merited and received the censure of the worst and the commendation of some of the best of opposite parties; . . .[1]

And in a series of lectures at Andover, Massachusetts in 1876-79, Henry Martyn Dexter, the great historian and bibliographer of Congregationalism, stated:

> It is clear that about the time of the Long Parliament the doctrines of Congregationalism had begun to make their way, as never before, among the better class of Puritans. Goodwin, Nye, Bridge, Burroughes and Simpson had come home from Holland after Laud had fallen, with some practical knowledge of Presbyterianism, and by their talents and culture at once took the lead of Independency in the kingdom; while in letters and treatises like those of Cotton, Hooker, and Davenport there was flowing over from their side of the sea a steady stream of influence in favor of the New England way.[2]

Further, W. K. Jordan, in his very comprehensive work on toleration in England, published 1932-40, has words of high praise for the Independent leaders in the Westminster Assembly:

> The paucity of their numbers was compensated by the energy and ability of their leadership. The five dissenting brethren were veteran disputants and seasoned writers, and were imbued with an heroic and implacable

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[1]Benjamin Hanbury, <u>Historical Memorials Relating to the Independents, or Congregationalists: From Their Rise to the Restoration of the Monarchy, A.D. MDCLX</u> (London: Printed for The Congregational Union of England and Wales by Fisher, Son, & Co.; and Jackson and Walford, Vol. I, 1839; Vol. II, 1841; Vol. III, 1844), Vol. II, pp. 204-05.

[2]Dexter, pp. 650-51.

> resolution to prevent the riveting of another system of intolerance upon England to replace the one only now in process of destruction.[3]

Finally, R. Tudur Jones, in his tercentenary volume on Congregationalism published in 1962, says of the Dissenting Brethren:

> The skill and tenacity with which they pressed their case against the majority [in the Westminster Assembly], as well as the firm stand they took for liberty of conscience, stirred up extensive sympathy for their views and when they published an exposition of their views under the title An Apologeticall Narration . . . the fierce pamphlet war that followed showed that they had already won a considerable measure of support.[4]

These excerpts from representative historians of Puritanism and Congregationalism prominent in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries serve to point up the fact that the Dissenting Brethren are, almost without exception, seen to have functioned in a pivotal capacity in the clarification, exposition, and defense of definitive Congregationalism in the middle decades of the seventeenth century. The virtual unanimity and the eagerness, then, with which historians, having occasion to write about seventeenth-century Congregationalism and Puritanism, credit these five men with having a central and crucial role in the development of the early Congregational idea and movement is one of the most striking initial facts to be noted about the Dissenting Brethren.

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[3]Jordan, Vol. III, p. 48.

[4]R. Tudur Jones, Congregationalism in England: 1662-1962 (London: Independent Press Ltd., 1962), p. 28.

A partial exception is Geoffrey F. Nuttall, who, in Visible Saints . . . , tends to downplay the long-range effect of their work somewhat. He is concerned to give credit to the large body of the Congregational ministers of the period who "went neither to the Netherlands nor to New England, neither to Westminster nor to the Savoy," but who collectively formed a significant block of opinion which was less organized or vocal than that of the prominent leaders.[5]

We find also in Nuttall's most recent book, The Puritan Spirit: Essays and Addresses, another point of at least partial disagreement with a contention which I shall be stressing in this study, and have already stressed to this point. He writes:

> The formal importance of the covenant has perhaps been overstressed in some recent Congregational apologia, for the seventeenth century was an age when covenants of all kinds were fashionable; they were not in the least a specialty of Congregational ecclesiology, as might now appear. What the covenant implied was mainly what would now be called committal and mutual trust: it helped to ensure church members' seriousness in their endeavours to fulfill their duty in the life of the church.[6]

I say partial disagreement here, for it will not be to our advantage to argue that Congregationalism was unique in its particular application of the doctrine of the covenant to the local church. Numerous groups to the left of the Congregationalists theologically and sociologically shared in the use of the concept. I shall nevertheless stress Congregationalism's peculiar

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[5]P. 19.

[6](London: Epworth Press, 1967), p. 64.

use of the church covenant idea[7] as a central mark of Congregational ecclesiology which sets it apart from Roman Catholicism, Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, and the "magisterial" Reformation on the Continent.

Perhaps equally remarkable, or indeed more remarkable, in view of what has just been said, is the corresponding scarcity of substantial secondary literature in existence about these men from the pens of nineteenth and twentieth-century historians or historical theologians. This writer has searched for such items for some time, and has found only the following major contributions: an article on Philip Nye regarding the church and state question;[8] an article on the Independents and church unity, featuring the Dissenting Brethren, and especially Jeremiah Burroughes;[9] a book on Thomas Goodwin's theology, having primarily a devotional intent;[10] a monograph on the Dissenting Brethren in Holland;[11] and a recent edition of the Apologeticall

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[7] I.e., its stress on the church covenant as an extension of the Covenant of Grace to the more personal level of mutual relations within a congregation, and its use of it there as the basic foundation for church organization.

[8] D. Nobbs, "Philip Nye on Church and State," The Cambridge Historical Journal, V (1935), No. 1.

[9] Winthrop S. Hudson, "Denominationalism as a Basis for Ecumenicity: A Seventeenth Century Conception," Church History, XXIV (March, 1955).

[10] Alexander Whyte, The Spiritual Life: The Teaching of Thomas Goodwin (1918).

[11] Berndt Gustafsson, The Five Dissenting Brethren: A Study on the Dutch Background of Their Independentism (Lund: C.W.K. Gleerup, 1955).

Narration, with an introduction of some length covering the setting and some of the theology involved.[12] Beyond these there are treatments of the work of the Dissenting Brethren of moderate length in books relating to the Westminster Assembly,[13] and some pages in a variety of works on Puritanism and related topics.[14] The Dissenting Brethren are frequently mentioned; and their importance, even their very crucial role, is usually stressed. But beyond rather brief elucidation, this is as far as the treatment goes.

Why, one must surely ask, has their importance, almost universally acknowledged, been in effect so eclipsed by the

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[12]Paul, An Apologeticall Narration.

[13]See Chapter VI of this study for detailed references to these items.

[14]The best treatments in this regard are:

Jordan, The Development of Religious Toleration in England, Vol. III.

William Haller, Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963; first pub. 1955), particularly Chap. IV, "An Assembly of Divines: 1643-1644."

The Introduction in A.S.P. Woodhouse, Puritanism and Liberty (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951).

Brief, but important, treatments are also found in:

Dexter, The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years.

Samuel R. Gardiner, History of the Great Civil War: 1642-49 (3 Vols.; London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1886-91).

Walker, The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism.

historians? Why have there not been articles, monographs, and books in profusion? Any historian would at least attempt to find underlying motives. This writer would suggest three: (1) Their significance as Congregational theorists and founders became swallowed up in the historians' eagerness to deal with the broader and more popular appeal and struggle of "political" Independency and the issue of religious toleration. They were in fact deeply involved with these issues themselves; and the issue of toleration became in the course of the controversy much more a concern of the Independent leaders than it had been at first. Henry W. Clark sums up the situation ably:

> The crucial point--though not the one appearing oftenest for discussion upon the Agenda--between Independency and Presbyterianism had become that of toleration. The issue was not merely or principally a clear one between two rival Church parties. The Presbyterians desired not alone the establishment of Presbyterianism, but the suppression of all other systems: liberty of conscience had now become the motto upon the Independent flag.[15]

Involved in all this also were the conduct of the civil wars, the composition of the Parliamentary Army, with its increasing tendency toward sectarian radicalism, and the government of the Commonwealth and Protectorate. Beside these large issues, the narrower really central concerns of the Dissenting Brethren--religious and theological concerns specifically--may easily appear to be just so much unfortunate petty denominationalism.[16]

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[15]Clark, Vol. I, p. 334.

[16]This is certainly the view of them taken in the period itself by the ecumenically-minded Presbyterian or moderate Episcopalian Richard Baxter, particularly with regard to the "Savoy Declaration" of 1658. For a discussion of Baxter's

(2) The Restoration of Charles II in 1660 had the effect of submerging much of what the Dissenting Brethren and their allies had built up, both institutionally and theologically, as Dissent entered a period of great persecution.

(3) The relative long-term success of their New England brethren overshadowed their own accomplishments, despite the fact that the Cambridge Synod's work and the Saybrook Platform depended directly upon what the Dissenting Brethren had set forth in the Savoy Declaration,[17] and there was continuous interaction and mutual influence between the Congregational leaders of old and New England to the point where one might well be led to consider the two streams of Congregationalism as really one and the same movement.[18]

These speculations having been entered, we pass now to the matter of brief biographical sketches of each of the Dissenting Brethren, and of some of their direct allies.

Thomas Goodwin

Thomas Goodwin was born on October 5, 1600, at the village of Rollesby in eastern Norfolk. From the "Memoir of

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views here, especially his negative view of Philip Nye, see Walker, p. 352; Frederick J. Powicke, A Life of the Reverend Richard Baxter: 1615-1691 (London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 1924), pp. 272-75 (Powicke's reference here being in part to Baxter's Reliquiae Baxterianae, Part II, pp. 188-93); and Fredericke J. Powicke, The Reverend Richard Baxter under the Cross (1662-1691), p. 202.

[17]Walker, Creeds . . . , pp. 353, 421-22, and 500-501.

[18]Robert Paul makes this point especially forcefully in his edition of An Apologeticall Narration, pp. 45ff.

Thomas Goodwin, D.D. Composed Out of His Own Papers and Memoirs, by His Son," reprinted in the nineteenth-century edition of his Works out of the seventeenth-century edition of the same, we hear him speak of his early years in typical if not painfully Puritan terms:

> I began to have some slighter workings of the Spirit of God from the time I was six years old; I could weep for my sins whenever I did set myself to think of them, and had flashes of joy upon thoughts of the things of God. I was affected with good motions and affections of love to God and Christ, for their love revealed to man, and with grief for sin as displeasing them. . . . I received the sacrament at Easter, when I was fourteen years old, and for that prepared myself as I was able. I set myself to examine whether I had grace or not; and by all the signs in Ursin's Catechism, which was in use among the Puritans in the College, I found them all, as I thought, in me. The love of God to such a sinner, and Christ's dying for me, did greatly affect me; . . .[19]

Goodwin's pious parents decided that he was destined for the ministry. Accordingly, after learning Greek and Latin, he entered Christ's College, Cambridge August 25, 1613,[20] graduating B.A. in 1616.[21] In 1619 he went to Catherine Hall, and graduated M.A. in 1620. During these years his spiritual life fluctuated, as he tells it:

> I made a great preparation for the next ensuing sacrament at Whitsuntide, and in the meantime I went to

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[19]John C. Miller, ed., The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D., Sometime President of Magdalene College, Oxford (12 vols.; "Nichol's Series of Standard Divines"; Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1861-65), Vol. II, p. lii.

[20]Ibid., p. li; Robert Halley, "Memoir of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.," ibid., p. xiii.

[21]Alexander Gordon, "Thomas Goodwin," Dictionary of National Biography, eds. Leslie Stephan and Sir Sidney Lee (1885 et seq.), hereinafter referred to as D.N.B.

hear Mr Sibbs, afterward Dr Sibbs, then lecturer at Trinity Church to the town of Cambridge, whose lectures the Puritans frequented. I also read Calvin's Institutions, and oh, how sweet was the reading of some parts of that book to me! How pleasing was the delivery of truths in a solid manner then to me! Before the sacrament was administered, I looked about upon the holy men in Christ's College, where I was bred; and how affected was I that I should go to heaven along with them! . . .

When I was in my place in the chapel, ready to receive the sacrament, being little of stature, the least of the whole University then, and for divers years, it fell out that my tutor, Mr Power, seeing me, sent to me that I should not receive it, but go out before all the College, which I did. This so much damped me, as I greatly pitied myself, but chiefly for this that my soul, which was full of expectation from this sacrament, was so unexpectedly disappointed of the opportunity. For I had long before verily thought that if I received that sacrament, I should be so confirmed that I should never fall away. But after this disappointment I left off praying, for being discouraged, I knew not how to go to God.

. . . . . .

When I was thus given over to the strength of my lusts, and further off from all goodness than ever I had been, and utterly out of hope that God would ever be so good unto me as to convert me; and being resolved to follow the world, and the glory, applause, preferment, and honour of it, and to use all means possible for these attainments; when I was one day going to be merry with my companions at Christ's College, from which I had removed to Catherine Hall, by the way hearing a bell toll at St Edmund's for a funeral, one of my company said there was a sermon, and pressed me to hear it. I was loath to go in, for I loved not preaching, especially not that kind of it which good men used, and which I thought to be dull stuff.

I went in before the hearse came, and took a seat; . . . . Inquiring who preached, they told me it was Dr Bambridge, ... He spake of deferring repentance, and of the danger of doing so.

. . . . . .

I thought myself to be as one struck down by a mighty power. The grosser sins of my conversation came in upon me, which I wondered at, as being unseasonable at first; and so the working began, and was prosecuted still more and more, higher and higher: and I endeavouring not to think the least thought of my sins, was passively held under the remembrance of them, and affected,

> so as I was rather passive all the while in it than active, and my thoughts held over, while the work went on.[22]

From these rumblings of the spirit there came to Goodwin a very Puritan type of thoroughgoing conversion, of which he later spoke in retrospect:

> But the most eminent property of my conversion to God, I have been speaking of, was this, that the glory of the great God was set up in my heart as the square and rule of each and every particular practice, both of faith and godliness, that I turned unto.[23]

The student became a fellow and took his B.D., being chosen as lecturer in Trinity Church, Cambridge, and then vicar of that church in 1632. He began to have doubts about his conformity to the established Church, and consulted John Cotton, who had started within his parish at Boston, Lincolnshire, England a covenanted church for the elect.[24] John Davenport, London minister of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, accompanied him.[25] Cotton convinced both of them of the necessity of nonconformity if they were to remain true to their consciences. Of this Larzer Ziff, Cotton's recent biographer, says:

> The results of his convincing Goodwin and Davenport were farther reaching than anyone present could have

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[22]Goodwin's Works, Vol. II, pp. lii-liv.

[23]Ibid., p. lxvi.

[24]Larzer Ziff, The Career of John Cotton: Puritanism and the American Experience (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1962), p. 49.

[25]Ibid., p. 68.

> conjectured. Goodwin was to find it difficult to continue in his conforming ways, and, after a year of trying, in 1634, he resigned his living in favor of Sibbes and fled to Holland, returning to England to become leader of the ministerial party which blocked Presbyterian control in Cromwell's day, and (consciously or not) kept the door open for the left wing of the Puritan movement. Davenport was, within the year, to resign his living, go to Holland, and thence, in 1637, to New England, where he helped to found the strong and influential colony of New Haven. Both men, from the date of their London meeting with Cotton, were his steadfast friends.[26]

While in exile Goodwin was pastor of the English church at Arnhem, Holland. "At the beginning of the Long Parliament (3 November 1640) he returned to London, and gathered an independent congregation in the parish of St. Dunstan's-in-the-East. In 1643 he was appointed a member of the Westminster Assembly, and took the covenant."[27] During the crucial years of the Assembly debates he and Philip Nye led the five (later seven) Dissenting Brethren and several other Independents in consistent opposition to the overwhelming Presbyterian majority. This, particularly during the years 1643 and 1644, was his most important period of activity. I shall cover it in detail in the next chapter of this study.

The period of Cromwell's ascendency following the years of Presbyterian dominance found him hardly less active, however. Goodwin was one of those Independents highly favored by the Commonwealth and Protectorate governments. This favor included the positions of Chaplain to the Council of State and

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[26] Ibid.

[27] "Thomas Goodwin," D.N.B.

the presidency of Magdalen College, Oxford. A frequent preacher at St. Mary's church, Oxford, he gathered a Congregational church at his lodgings at Whitehall.[28] One of the "commissioners for the approbation of public preachers" ("triers") during Cromwell's rule, he served with John Owen as a leader of the Savoy Conference just after the Protector's death. Forced from Oxford by the Restoration, Goodwin removed his gathered church formed there during his Magdalen presidency to London. He died February 23, 1680. His son, Thomas the Younger, along with Thankful Owen and Thomas Baron, edited and published posthumously the better part of his total output of written works.

From Calamy Revised we learn that an "informer stated, 1663, that Goodwin met often with Dr. Owen:[29] also that Mrs. Holmes 'at ye red Lyon a Grocers Shop in St. Laurence Lane . . . now or lately paid & discharged ye Rent for ye house wch Thomas Goodwin lives in, att Bone Hill beyond ye Artillery Ground near Cherry Tree Ally.'"[30] This probably has no real relevance to present matters, but it is the kind of intriguing comment which one might be disposed to follow up if one were concerned primarily here with the biography of Goodwin. Also interesting

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[28]Ibid.; and Albert Peel, The Congregational Two Hundred: 1530-1948 (London: The Independent Press Ltd., 1948), pp. 72-73.

[29]See below, p. 89 for Owen.

[30]A. G. Matthews, Calamy Revised: Being a Revision of Edmund Calamy's Account of the Ministers and Others Ejected and Silenced, 1660-2 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1934), pp. 228-29.

in this regard are his nickname, "Dr. Ninecaps," after the extraordinary headgear which he was accustomed to wearing, his custom of preaching in rather flamboyant robes, and the very somber nature of his lodgings at Magdalen College while he was President there.[31] Apparently the intellectual leader of the Dissenting Brethren was something of an eccentric character in his personal life, or at least had the reputation of being so.

Philip Nye

This leader of the Assembly Independents was born about 1596. His father was rector of Clapham, Essex. The year 1615 found him at Brasenose College, Oxford, from which place he moved the next year to Magdalen Hall (B.A., 1619; M.A., 1622). Nonconformity forced him from Church of England curacies into Holland exile, at Arnhem, in 1633. He returned to England in 1640. While vicar of Kimbolton, Huntingdonshire, he organized an Independent church. As a member of the Westminster Assembly Nye was sent with Stephen Marshall as a commissioner to Scotland for negotiations about military aid and religious unity.[32]

Of Nye Robert Paul says:

> Philip Nye was an enigma. Although he was universally recognized as the political leader of the Independent

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[31]Robert Halley, "Memoir of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.," Works, II, pp. xxxii-xxxiii; "Thomas Goodwin," D.N.B.; Peel, Cong. Two Hundred, p. 73.

[32]Alexander Gordon, "Philip Nye," D.N.B.; Peel, Cong. Two Hundred, pp. 55-57.

> ministers in the Assembly and became one of the most influential ministers during the Protectorate, his figure remains more or less in the shadows. If he was less erudite than Thomas Goodwin, he was an able enough scholar and far more of a practical politician, and this undoubtedly accounts for the widespread reputation he had as a schemer among those who distrusted the Independents. Richard Baxter spoke of 'Mr. Phillip Nye's Policie' in the Assembly, Thomas Edwards accused him of playing the politician, while Anthony Wood, who detested him, described him as 'a most dangerous and seditious person, a poetic Pulpit driver of Independency.'[33]

In 1654 Cromwell appointed him as one of the "Triers." A leader of the Savoy Conference along with Goodwin and Owen, Nye came near to being excluded from the indemnity at the Restoration. When the 1672 Declaration of Indulgence was promulgated, he again became one of the ministers (the "doctor" in this case) of an Independent church in London. He died that year.[34] Perhaps his most important writings as an individual apart from the Dissenting Brethren were published in the Restoration period. Of these we shall hear more in a subsequent section of this study.[35]

William Bridge

Born probably in the year 1600, Bridge was most likely a native of Cambridgeshire. At sixteen he went to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, and was graduated M.A. at twenty-six.[36]

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[33]Paul, An Apologeticall Narration, pp. 89-90.

[34]"Philip Nye," D.N.B.; Matthews, Calamy Revised . . . , pp. 369-70.

[35]See Chapter VII, section D.

[36]"Memoir," The Works of the Rev. William Bridge, M.A. (5 vols.; London: Thomas Tegg, 1845), Vol. I, p. xii.

In 1631 he became lecturer of Colchester, and Friday lecturer at St. George's, Tombland, Norwich, in 1633. This is according to information contained in the "Memoir" in the 1845 edition of his Works,[37] and the D.N.B. article on Bridge.[38] Peel, however, has him as rector of the Norwich church.[39] In 1636 Bridge was rector of St. Peter's, Hungate, Norwich, where Bishop Wren silenced him for nonconformity.[40] Fleeing some time later to Holland, he became associated in the ministry of an Independent church at Rotterdam with Jeremiah Burroughes, succeeding Hugh Peters in the post. Here he renounced his Anglican ordination and was reordained in the manner of the Independents by Samuel Ward.[41]

Returning to England in 1642, Bridge became one of the Assembly divines. In 1643 he became minister to a Congregational church at Great Yarmouth. At the Restoration he went to Clapham, near London, and preached at the Independent church there, possibly founding it. There he died, March 12, 1670.[42]

Sidrach Simpson

Simpson should be mentioned next here, for he figures

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Alexander Gordon, "William Bridge," D.N.B.

[39] Peel, Cong. Two Hundred, p. 73.

[40] Bridge's Works, Vol. I, p. xii.

[41] "William Bridge," D.N.B.

[42] "William Bridge," D.N.B.; Peel, Cong. Two Hundred, p. 73.

closely after Bridge in the story of the Holland exile. Born in 1600, he too was of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Some of his contemporaries spelled his name Sydrach,[43] and so does the British Museum Catalogue of Printed Books. Curate of St. Margaret's, Fish Street, London, he was charged by Archbishop Laud with breach of the canons in 1635. He went to Rotterdam, probably in 1638, where he joined the Independent church in which Bridge was doctor and Ward pastor.[44] A bitter debate ensued. Robert Paul tells the story, taken largely from Thomas Edwards' Antapologia:

> Soon after Simpson's arrival at Rotterdam he began to take exception to some of the procedures in the church. In particular, Edwards records, 'he stood for the ordinance of prophesying to be exercised in that Church, that the people on the Lords dayes should have liberty after the Sermons ended, to put doubts and questions to the Ministers, &c. and he was troubled at a ruling Elder in that Church brought in by Mr Bridge (which belike had more power and bore more sway than himselfe).' As a result of this difference, Simpson left the church without waiting for letters of dismission, and with the help of a certain Mrs. White, founded a new church, which at the beginning had five members. Samuel Ward sympathized with those who had left on the question of 'prophesying' [i.e., preaching], and the upshot of his disagreement with Bridge was that for this and other reasons (none of them substantial) he was deposed from his position as pastor.[45]

The difficulties continued through letters which Bridge and Ward wrote against each other. Simpson wrote to friends

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[43]Alexander Gordon, "Sidrach Simpson," D.N.B.

[44]Ibid.

[45]Paul, An Apologeticall Narration, pp. 98-99.

in England against Bridge. Jeremiah Burroughes took Ward's place in Bridge's congregation (as Teacher, Paul says;[46] but the D.N.B. says that Bridge was Teacher or Doctor, and Ward Pastor, as I have pointed out above[47]).

Returning to England in 1641, Simpson again lectured at St. Margaret's, Fish Street, and at Blackfriars, and co-operated with the other Dissenting Brethren for the furtherance of their common cause in the Assembly. In 1650 he was made Master of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, and about the same time became pastor of St. Mary's Abchurch, London, where he effected a Congregational reorganization of the parish. The year 1653 found him as rector of St. Bartholomew, Exchange. In 1654 he was appointed one of the "Triers." His death came in 1655, well before the Restoration period brought an end to promising careers for prominent Congregational clergy.

Jeremiah Burroughes

Born in 1599, educated also at Emmanuel College, Cambridge (M.A., 1624), Burroughes left the academic community on account of his nonconformity. Although appointed rector of Tivetshall, Norfolk, he was suspended by Bishop Wren in 1636, and the next year went to Rotterdam as Teacher of the Congregational church. Returning home in 1641, preaching at

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[46] Ibid., p. 99.

[47] "Sidrach Simpson," D.N.B.

Stepney and Cripplegate, he was found among the Assembly divines in 1643. Although definitely one of the Dissenting Brethren, Burroughes was less disposed to controversy than the rest. He never, for instance, gathered a Congregational church out of existing parish structures, a practice of the Independents which generally infuriated the Presbyterians, for whom regular parish boundaries rightly-ordered were a part of the divinely-ordained plan of church government. Richard Baxter--to whom Philip Nye was anathema--was very favorably disposed toward Burroughes and his irenic approach to the discussion of matters of church theory and polity. Burroughes died on November 13, 1646, his death being the result of injuries sustained in a fall off a horse.[48]

William Greenhill

Greenhill, while not one of the original "five" Dissenting Brethren who signed An Apologeticall Narration of 1643/44, was one of the seven who signed in 1645 the Reasons of the Dissenting Brethren against the Third Proposition, Concerning Presbyterial Government (published in 1648, along with the Assembly's Answer). His personal literary effort on behalf of this cause was minimal, but he made a significant contribution in editing for publication some of the works of the

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[48]The preceding material is taken from Alexander Gordon, "Jeremiah Burroughes," D.N.B.; and Peel, Cong. Two Hundred, pp. 69-70.

others.

Born probably in 1591 in Oxfordshire, he was to be found in Oxford in 1604, graduating B.A. in 1608/9 and M.A. in 1612 from Magdalen College. Running afoul also of Bishop Matthew Wren in the diocese of Norwich, he became evening preacher at Stepney in London (while Burroughes preached there in the morning). The year 1643 found him in the Westminster Assembly. In 1644 he became pastor of the first Congregational church at Stepney. In 1649 Parliament appointed him chaplain to three of the slain king's children. In 1654 he became a Trier. While continuing as pastor of the Congregational church at Stepney, Greenhill was appointed vicar of St. Dunstan's-in-the-East, from which post the Restoration government ejected him in 1660. He continued pastor of the Independent church at Stepney until his death on the twenty-seventh of September, 1671.[49]

William Carter

Another of the seven signing the Reasons of the Dissenting Brethren (1645), Carter is the most obscure of these leaders. He is the only one not covered by a D.N.B. article; nor is he mentioned--except in passing--anywhere in the secondary literature which this writer has perused, with the one exception of Benjamin Brook, in his The Lives of the Puritans. Brook does

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[49]The preceding material is taken from William A. Greenhill, "William Greenhill," D.N.B.

sketch his career very briefly, and it is from the Brook account that we must take what information there is to be had.

Born in 1605 and educated at Cambridge, Carter became a popular London preacher. In 1643 he became a member of the Assembly of Divines, and also a licenser of the press. In 1654 he was appointed a Trier. He continued preaching and lecturing before large crowds in London, and on occasion before Parliament. He died about June, 1658.[50]

John Cotton

Of the Dissenting Brethren's important contemporaries, the man perhaps closest to them in thought and deed was John Cotton. (There were a few other "Independents" in the Assembly who supported their position;[51] but of them as individuals we hear little.) Allusion has already been made--in the biographical sketch of Thomas Goodwin here--to Cotton's role in converting Goodwin and John Davenport to nonconformity. Supporters of the position set forth in An Apologeticall Narration looked to the New England experiment of which Cotton was prime mover as proof that Independent polity worked.[52] "In 1644,

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[50]Benjamin Brook, The Lives of the Puritans: Containing a Biographical Account of Those Divines Who Distinguished Themselves in the Cause of Religious Liberty, from the Reformation Under Queen Elizabeth to the Act of Uniformity, in 1662 (3 vols.; London: James Black, 1813), Vol. III, p. 299.

[51]See p. 90 below.

[52]Ziff, p. 180.

The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven was published with the endorsement of Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye, thereby signalizing that it was not still another New England description but a document which was to take its place as the chief argument of the party which had brought out the Apologeticall Narration in the preceding year."[53] John Baillie, the official commissioner of the Scottish Kirk whose writings form an important portion of the records extant of the day-to-day workings of the Assembly of Divines, assumed that Goodwin had been directly influenced by Cotton toward adopting the Independent way.[54] In controversy with Roger Williams Cotton "agreed with Nye and Goodwin that his road was the 'middle way' between Presbyterianism and separatism."[55]

Cotton was born in 1584 at Derby. Educated at Trinity College, Cambridge (B.A., 1603; M.A., 1606), he was a Lecturer and Dean at Emmanuel College for six years. In 1613 he took his B.D.,[56] and the year found him to be vicar of St. Botolph's, Boston, a position which he had accepted in 1612.[57] There he departed from the Prayer Book service. He became convinced that more was required of sincere Christians than the normal routine of the established Church.

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[53] Ibid., p. 191.

[54] Ibid., p. 198.

[55] Ibid., p. 213.

[56] Peel, Cong. Two Hundred, p. 43.

[57] Ziff, p. 38.

> Accordingly, in 1615, John Cotton, with cautious firmness rather than enthusiastic zeal, set about distinguishing the lily from the thorns. He accomplished this, in keeping with his reasoning, not by withdrawing from a parish church which, of necessity, included all persons in the area howsoever scandalous, but by identifying the elect and withdrawing into a tighter inner group with them, a group which avoided the offensive ceremonies and which was truly qualified to receive the sacrament. This group, a prosperous portion of the community, entered into a covenant with the Lord and with one another 'to follow after the Lord in the purity of his Worship.' They became, in effect, a congregation within the congregation.[58]

Called before the High Commission in 1632, he fled to London and subsequently sailed for the new Boston, where he was made teacher of the congregation. He turned the new Boston into something of a rigid theocracy. His extended and bitter controversy with Roger Williams is well known. He wrote extensively in defense of the New England way, and died in 1652.[59]

Thomas Hooker

Three New England men--John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, and John Davenport--were invited by the Independents in Parliament to sit in the Westminster Assembly. Cotton wanted to go, but Hooker argued that Thomas Goodwin and his immediate associates (he thought there were only two of these) would be their only allies in the Assembly, and refused to go.[60] Hooker's A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline, written in answer to

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[58] Ibid., p. 49. The internal quotation is from John Cotton, The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared (London, 1948), p. 20.

[59] Peel, Cong. Two Hundred, pp. 43-45.

[60] Walker, Creeds . . . , p. 140; Ziff, p. 179.

Samuel Rutherford's Due Right of Presbyteries . . . and approved by a convention of the clergy of the New England colonies on July 1, 1645, contributed materially to the furtherance of the Congregational cause in England nonetheless.[61]

Hooker was born at Marfield, Leicester County, probably July 7, 1586. He graduated from Emmanuel College, Cambridge (B.A., 1608; M.A., 1611). Rector of Esher, Surrey, then lecturer at St. Mary's, Chelmsford, he was forced out by Archbishop Laud in 1629. Summoned by the High Commission, he fled to Holland in 1630, becoming one of the ministers of an English nonconformist congregation there, and then William Ames' associate in the ministry at Rotterdam. He went to New England in 1633, and became teacher of the congregation at Newtown. In 1636 he and his associate Samuel Stone moved with the majority of their congregation to Hartford, where his leadership of Connecticut constitutes yet another story. He died in 1647.[62]

John Davenport and Richard Mather

In London in 1643--an opportune time for lending weight to Congregational arguments in the Assembly--there appeared a three-part work entitled Church-Government and Church-Covenant Discussed, with a preface by Hugh Peter. The first two parts were by Richard Mather, and the third by John Davenport. Davenport's contribution consisted of a reply, in 1638/9, on behalf

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[61]Walker, Creeds . . . , p. 141.

[62]Ibid., p. 140; Peel, Cong. Two Hundred, pp. 48-50.

of the New England ministers and their Congregational church-way, to an alarmed Presbyterian-leaning treatise sent over to New England in 1636 or 1637 entitled A Letter of Many Ministers in Old England, Requesting the Judgement of their Reverend Brethren in New England Concerning Nine Positions. . . . And one of Mather's contributions consisted of an answer in 1639 to Thirty-two Questions, a missive of similar import as A Letter of Many Ministers . . . , sent over by English Puritans about the same time as the Letter. . . .[63] Of the contents of these I shall have occasion to speak later in this study.[64]

John Davenport was born at Coventry in 1597, and left Oxford without a degree. In 1624 he became vicar of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, London. I have noted his conversion to nonconformity, along with Thomas Goodwin, in encounter with John Cotton. In 1633 he fled to Holland, and in 1637 sailed for New England. He became pastor at New Haven in 1638. In 1661 he sheltered the fugitive regicides Whalley and Goffe for a month in his home. In 1667 he entered into a ministry at First Church, Boston, where a dispute ensued about the Half-Way Covenant. He died in 1670.[65]

Richard Mather was born near Liverpool in 1596. Early in his career he was Master of Toxteth Grammar School. He was

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[63]Walker, Creeds . . . , pp. 134-35.

[64]See Chapter IX.

[65]Peel, Cong. Two Hundred, pp. 64-66.

later minister there, was suspended for nonconformity, restored, and suspended again in 1634. By then he was a Congregationalist in his views, and set sail for New England the next year, becoming minister at Dorchester.[66] He is credited with compiling the text of the Cambridge Platform, which Williston Walker called "the most important monument of early New England Congregationalism, because it is the clearest reflection of the system as it lay in the minds of the first generation on our soil after nearly twenty years of practical experience."[67] His ministry at Dorchester was lifelong. He died in 1669.

John Goodwin

John Goodwin was the brother of Thomas. His prominence was perhaps greatest of the English Independents of the period. It came about, however, from his role in the working out of the broader base of political Independency, a movement which encompassed far more than the theologically Congregational Independency of the Dissenting Brethren. I shall have more to say of this later in this study.[68]

Of John Goodwin W. K. Jordan has written:

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[66] Ibid., pp. 59-61; Kenneth Ballard Murdock, Increase Mather: The Foremost American Puritan (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1925), p. 30.

[67] Walker, Creeds . . . , pp. 184-85.

[68] See Chapter X.

> John Goodwin gave to religious toleration the ablest and most systematic defence which it was to receive during the period under survey. Goodwin was chiefly responsible for the enlargement of Congregational thought into Independency, and his prolific and provocative pen, during a critical period, gave to the Independent position clarity, vigour, and persuasiveness. Just as Independency was about to gain its demand for sectarian status, Goodwin progressed to an even more radical and unorthodox position, endowing a large group of sectarian pamphleteers with a vast mine of thought and speculation which was to serve during the remainder of our period as a quarry for those devoted to the principles of religious toleration. Seldom indeed in English thought has any man exercised so profound and decisive an influence upon historical and religious development as did this interesting and complex figure.[69]

Born in Norfolk in 1594, Goodwin was educated at Cambridge. In 1632 he became vicar of St. Stephen's, Coleman Street, London.[70] From 1643 to 1646 he attacked what he conceived to be Presbyterian totalitarian bigotry "in a prolific swarm of pamphlets and books marked by bitter irony, ridicule, and occasional scurrility, but imbued withal with an unswerving devotion to religious liberty."[71]

Goodwin was impatient with the leaders of Independency in the Assembly because of their relatively cautious conservatism. He was deprived of his position in 1645 because of unorthodox doctrine, and began an Independent church on Coleman Street. He was highly unsatisfied with Cromwell's attempted settlement of religion. He died in 1665.[72]

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[69]Jordan, Vol. III, p. 376.

[70]Ibid., pp. 376-77.

[71]Ibid., p. 378.

[72]Ibid., pp. 377-79.

John Owen

If John Goodwin was a renegade from Congregational denominationalism, John Owen was a founding father. His most important contributions came at the Savoy Conference and in the leadership of the Congregational movement in the Restoration period.

Born in 1616 at Stadham, he was graduated from Christ Church, Oxford, B.A. in 1632 and M.A. in 1635. He was appointed to ministries in Fordham, Essex and Coggeshall. Cromwell made him a chaplain and preacher to the Council, also Dean of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Oxford. He preached to a London congregation in the Restoration period, and led Congregationalism through persecution. He died on August 24, 1683.[73]

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[73]Peel, Cong. Two Hundred, pp. 81-83; A. Thompson, "Life of Dr. Owen, William H. Goold, ed., The Works of John Owen (17 vols.; London: Johnstone and Hunter; and New York: Robert Carter and Bros., 1850-54), Vol. I, pp. xix-cxxii.

CHAPTER VI

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CLASSICAL INDEPENDENCY

A. The Dissenting Brethren at the Westminster Assembly

The Independents, led by the "five," constituted almost immediately a recognizable group within the larger body of divines and parliamentary representatives who made up the Westminster Assembly. We may add to the five the two who signed the Reasons. . . .[1] Further, Robert Baillie, the Scottish commissioner, speaks of "ten or eleven" of this party in the Assembly.[2] He adds the actual names of John Philips and Joseph Caryl to those of the seven; and Daniel Neal's History of the Puritans adds the name of Anthony Burges.[3] W. M. Hetherington states that a few of those who could not normally be considered members of the Independent party on occasion supported the group on specific issues.[4] Altogether, then, the Independent party formed a very small portion of the one

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[1]See biographical sketches of William Greenhill and William Carter above.

[2]David Laing, ed., Letters and Journals of John Baillie, A.M. (3 vols.; Edinburgh: Robert Ogle, 1841-42), Vol. II, p. 110; cited in W. M. Hetherington, History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines (New York: Mark H. Newman, 1843), p. 120.

[3](5 vols.; London, 1822), Vol. II, pp. 275, 360; cited in Hetherington, p. 120.

[4]Hetherington, p. 120.

hundred and fifty-two names on the list in the ordinance which created the Assembly as an advisory body for Parliament on church-government issues.[5] Even given the fact that a number of these people never showed up, and of those who did about sixty to eighty usually would be there on any given day,[6] the Independents were very greatly outnumbered.

The Westminster Assembly met for the first time, on call of Parliament, July 1, 1643. It consisted in membership not only of the large Presbyterian-leaning majority (including the half-dozen commissioners of the Scottish Kirk) and the Independent opposition, but also of a small but vocal Erastian party,[7] who feared and fought clerical control of the Church, whether it be by Presbyterians or Independents. William Haller tells us that "the most formidable and exasperating critic of the Westminster divines was John Selden, the head, according to Baillie, of the Erastian faction in parliament, but a member also of the assembly itself, privileged like other members to debate and vote on all questions that came before it."[8] Selden went so far as to say "that the Parliament is the Church."[9]

As the Assembly Erastians, though small, constituted an important group because they reflected the views of a strong

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[5]Hetherington, p. 120.

[6]Ibid., pp. 98-99.

[7]Ibid., p. 123.

[8]Haller, p. 230.

[9]Baillie, Vol. II, pp. 265-66; also quoted in Haller, p. 231.

Erastian element in the Parliament itself, so the Assembly Independents were accorded more recognition and deference than might have otherwise been the case because the Presbyterian divines realized that their ties were close--particularly through Philip Nye's connections--to an ever-increasingly powerful body of sectarian-based political Independency in the army.[10] The connection and the Presbyterian majority's knowledge of the connection are mentioned here in order to point up the fact that--if not by choice of the ostensible majority, but rather because of political pressures too powerful to be ignored--the Independents in the Assembly were given full opportunity for the expression and debate of the issues as they saw them. It is to the course of that debate that we now turn.

The primary sources for knowledge of these debates are the contemporary accounts from participants contained in: John Lightfoot, The Journal of the Proceedings of the Assembly of Divines, from January 1, 1643, to December 31, 1644[11]; Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie, A.M.[12]; The Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines[13]; and George

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[10]Hetherington, pp. 123, 132; Masson, Vol. III, p. 23. See Chapter X, section B.

[11]Vol. XIII of John Rogers Pitman, ed., The Whole Works of the Rev. John Lightfoot, D.D. (London: J. F. Dove, 1824).

[12]See n. 2, this chap.

[13]A. F. Mitchell and J. Struthers, eds. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood & Sons, 1824). This book is helpful as general background to the consideration of these deliberations.

Gillespie, Notes of Debates and Proceedings of the Westminster Assembly of Divines.[14] The best accounts compiled from these sources are those contained in the following: W. M. Hetherington, History of the Westminster Assembly of Divines[15]; David Masson, The Life of John Milton: Narrated in Connexion with the Political, Ecclesiastical, and Literary History of His Time, Vol. III: 1643-1649[16]; William A. Shaw, A History of the English Church During the Civil Wars and under the Commonwealth: 1640-1660[17]; W. K. Jordan, The Development of Religious Toleration in England, Vol. III[18]; Alexander F. Mitchell, The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards[19]; and William Haller, Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution.[20]

We shall be concerned here with tracing the highlights

I have not, however, found it to be sufficiently useful that citations from its pages have been necessitated in the course of this chapter. This is true for two reasons: (1) The "Minutes" as here presented are very sketchy, with many uncompleted sentences, and omissions. (2) They begin after the period in the Assembly debates when the major portion of the discussions on church government in which the Dissenting Brethren played a significant role were held.

[14]David Meek, ed., in The Works of Mr. George Gillespie, Minister of Edinburgh, and One of the Commissioners from Scotland to the Westminster Assembly, 1644 . . . (2 vols.; Edinburgh: Robert Ogle and Oliver and Boyd, 1846), Vol. II.

[15]See n. 2, this chap.

[16]See n. 8, Chap. I.

[17](2 vols.; London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1900).

[18]See n. 3, Chap. II.

[19](London: James Nisbet & Co., 1888).

[20]See n. 14, Chap. V.

of those portions of the Westminster Assembly debates which impinge directly upon the Presbyterian-Independent confrontation on church government. Central points of discussion

> were, inter alia, whether many congregations might be under a common presbytery, or each with its own presbytery or eldership ought to form an independent church; 2d, whether appeals might be carried from congregations to a common or classical presbytery, and from that again to a provincial synod and national assembly, and might be authoritatively disposed of by them, or whether such synods and assemblies ought to be advisory only; 3d, whether the power of ordination to the ministry did not properly vest in the common or classical presbytery, or whether it might be completely, at its own pleasure, assumed by any single congregation which might without inconvenience associate with others.[21]

Albert Peel has written: "To them [the Independents] the Scriptures were the authority, and they believed they found in the Scriptures gathered, autonomous churches."[22] The Presbyterians, of course, were no less sure that they had found their system in Scripture. Neither side was hesitant about the divine source of its convictions. Hence the debate was hardly dialogue aimed at mutual understanding.

The Assembly began with the fairly non-controversial (for the assembled divines, at least) task of revising the Thirty-nine Articles in a more Calvinistic direction. Also, commissioners were early sent to Scotland from Parliament and the Assembly to effect a political and religious agreement,

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[21] Mitchell, Westminster Assembly, p. 192.

[22] Albert Peel, The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order, 1658 (London: Independent Press, 1939), p. 10.

Philip Nye being one of the Assembly commissioners. The result was the Solemn League and Covenant, and the deputation of clerical and lay Scottish representatives to the Assembly.[23] The English commissioners had found the General Assembly of the Scottish Kirk in session, debating among other things, "the late extraordinar multiplying of witches, especially in Fifeshire."[24]

On October 12, 1643, while in the midst of a debate on the sixteenth of the Thirty-nine Articles, the Assembly received this order from Parliament:

> 'Upon serious consideration of the present state and conjuncture of the affairs of this kingdom, the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament do order, that the Assembly of Divines and others do forthwith confer and treat among themselves, of such a discipline and government as may be most agreeable to God's Holy Word, and most apt to procure and preserve the peace of the Church at home, and nearer agreement with the Church of Scotland, and other Reformed Churches abroad, to be settled in this Church in stead and place of the present Church government by archbishops, bishops, and their chancellors, commissaries, deans, deans and chapters, archdeacons, and other ecclesiastical officers, depending upon the hierarchy, which is resolved to be taken away; and touching and concerning the Directory of Worship, or Liturgy, hereafter to be in the Church; and to deliver their opinions and advices of, touching the same, to both or either House of Parliament, with all the convenient speed they can.'[25]

Thomas Goodwin and other Independents wanted first the discussion of the prior question as to "whether the Scriptures

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[23]Masson, Vol. III, pp. 4-18.

[24]Ibid., p. 8.

[25]Hetherington, pp. 135-36.

contain a rule for government,"[26] that is, whether God in Christ has in fact ordained a particular form of church government. Goodwin thought that to be the case. On that much he and his people were in agreement with the Presbyterians.

John Lightfoot wanted a discussion of the nature of the Church, a basic search for definition. But the majority at this point preferred to shy away from potentially explosive topics as long as possible, and get on with what business was transactable while there was some semblance of unity among the divines.[27]

Accordingly, from October, 1643, to January, 1643/4, the general topic of church officers and offices was debated.[28] Hetherington sums up the results of the debates of 1643 thus:

> It had . . . been solemnly decided, that Christ is so completely the Head of the Church, that all its offices are essentially in him, and from him are they all primarily and authoritatively derived; that of these offices some are extraordinary, and have ceased--those, namely, of apostles, prophets, and evangelists; that pastors and doctors, or teachers, are essentially the same, and form the highest order of divinely appointed officers in the Church; that ruling elders are also of divine appointment, and are distinct from pastors; and that deacons are likewise of divine and permanent institution, though not entitled to preach or to rule, but to take charge of charitable and pecuniary concerns.[29]

Yet even here there had been several disagreements. Goodwin questioned whether, as the majority report implied, Christ's

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[26] Ibid., p. 136.

[27] Ibid., pp. 136-37.

[28] Masson, Vol. III, pp. 3, 19.

[29] Hetherington, p. 144.

influence in the church comes through its officers.[30] Further, "the Independent brethren resisted the idea that the power of the keys was committed to the apostles in any sense implying official church authority."[31] Also, "the Independents maintained the divine institution of a doctor, as distinct from a pastor, in every congregation."[32] Doctors to the Independents were teachers with special responsibilities in the congregation, associate ministers of a sort, or--to put the point in twentieth-century terms--ministers of education. Further, the institution of ruling elders, essentially imported from Scotland, was looked at by the Independents with less than enthusiasm; but Goodwin and his friends went along on this in general terms for the sake of peace.[33] Finally, toward the close of this portion of the debates, objections were raised against the gathering of churches out of already existing parishes, and Philip Nye objected to the objections.[34]

Next, in January, 1643/4, the subject of ordination was begun.[35] It was proposed by the majority that the apostles in the New Testament had set the pattern of ordination, that is, the setting apart of new church officers to their appointed tasks, by already existing church officers. The Independents, however, held that the church, as a body which had declared its

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[30] Ibid., p. 138. [31] Ibid., p. 139.

[32] Ibid., p. 140; Baillie, Vol. II, p. 110, cited in Shaw, Vol. I, pp. 158-59.

[33] Ibid., p. 142. [34] Ibid., p. 145.

[35] Masson, Vol. III, p. 20.

faith and "entered into a mutual church-covenant,"[36] possessed the power in itself to ordain.[37] It was suggested that the Independents form a committee and report out their position on the matter. Nye so reported, as recorded by Lightfoot in his Journal:

> Friday, Jan. 19[7]--This morning the first thing we did, was, that Mr. Nye reported from the Independent committee in these two propositions:
>
> 1. Ordination, for the substance of it is the solemnization of an officer's outward call, in which the elders of the church, in the name of Christ, and for the church, do, by a visible sign, design the person, and ratify his separation to his office; with prayer for, and blessing upon, his gifts in the ministration thereof. . . .
>
> 2. That the power that gives the formal being to an officer, should be derived by Christ's institution from the power that is in elders as such, on the act of ordination,--as yet we find not any where held forth in the word.[38]

However, pressure from the House of Lords for a rapid solution brought a vote in favor of ordination by a group of neighboring ministers as the normal scriptural form, despite vigorous rejoinders by Goodwin, Nye, and others. They feared that this resolution tended in the direction of the imposition of a formal presbytery.[39]

Subjects for debate intertwined in the Assembly's procedures. Several related subjects would be going at once. Parliament would send a rush order for action on a topic, and present deliberations would be abruptly halted, to be taken

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[36]Hetherington, p. 166.

[37]Ibid., p. 147.

[38]Lightfoot, pp. 114-15.

[39]Hetherington, pp. 150-51.

up again sometimes months later. Assembly committees which had been working on resolutions on a particular topic would break into the proceedings over some other topic with their report. Just so, on January 19, the same day as Nye's report noted above, Dr. Cornelius Burgess brought in the first report of the committee on presbytery, to the following effect:

> 1. The Scripture holdeth out a presbytery in a church. I Tim. iv. 14, Acts xv. 2. 4. 6.
> 2. A presbytery consisteth of ministers of the word, and such other public officers, as have been already voted to have a share in the government in the church.[40]

About at this point, in late January or early February, the five Dissenting Brethren chose to further their cause--which was not having conspicuous success in the Assembly--by appealing over the heads of the Assembly majority to Parliament and the public at large. They issued An Apologeticall Narration Humbly Submitted to the Honourable Houses of Parliament.[41] This set forth for all to hear their basic position on church government, reviewed their experiences in Holland which had in part led them thereto, and portrayed them as misunderstood and vilified martyrs for a just cause. Of the detailed contents of An Apologeticall Narration we shall hear more in the next major part of this study.[42] It is sufficient for purposes of this historical sketch to indicate that the

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[40]Lightfoot, p. 115. [41]Hetherington, p. 156.

[42]See Chapter VIII, section A.

publication of this broadside at this time "operated instantaneously like a declaration of war."[43]

Answers in pamphlet form from the Presbyterian side were not long in coming. A Scot living in London, Adam Steuart, wrote Some Observations and Annotations upon the Apologeticall Narration. . . .[44] Charles Herle wrote The Independency upon Scripture of the Independency of Churches.[45] Thomas Edwards wrote a long and vitriolic attack entitled Antapologia; or a Full Answer to the Apologeticall Narration. . . .[46] He also wrote Gangraena: or, A Catalogue and Discovery of Many of the Errours . . . of the Sectaries.[47] And there were other answers, none of them friendly.

Meanwhile, in the Assembly the majority pressed on. On February 6 this proposition was moved: "The Scripture holdeth forth, that many particular congregations may be under one presbyterial government."[48] Goodwin opposed this, contending: "If many elders, put together, make one presbytery classical, then every one of these elders is to be reputed as an elder to every one of those churches. But the

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[43]Hetherington, p. 163; cf. Masson, Vol. III, p. 24.

[44](London: Printed for Christopher Meredith, 1643/4); also cited in Masson, Vol. III, p. 25.

[45]Hetherington, p. 163.

[46](London: Printed by G. M. for Ralph Smith, 1644); also cited in ibid., p. 164.

[47](3 parts; London: R. Smith, 1646).

[48]Ibid., p. 169.

word of God doth not warrant any such thing."[49] He explicated:

> 1. The deacons are not to be officers to divers churches; ergo, not the pastor.
> 2. The pastor is not to preach in divers churches; ergo, not to rule.
> 3. The several congregations are not to give honour or maintenance to the pastor of another church.
> 4. One pastor was not chosen, ordained and maintained by divers churches; ergo, not to have power in them.
> 5. Several offices are not to meet in one and the same person.[50]

Also, Philip Nye injected into the debate the point that meetings of classes (i.e., presbyteries) and synods were held by the Independents to be in fact "very useful and profitable; yet possibly agreeable to the institution of Christ."[51] This, however, is not for Nye the crucial point. He says that "the quaere is this, Whether these meetings have the same power that 'ecclesia prima,' or one single congregation has."[52] In other words, Nye here is ruling out strict Independency. Churches have a scriptural obligation to consult in synods. But such synods serve in only a secondary capacity in the total life of the church catholic. The primary power of the church, the power of both ordination and censure or discipline, dwells within the single congregation. It is "ecclesia prima."

In opposition to this line of reasoning the Presbyterians spent much time citing instances of presbyterial or "classical" church government in action in the city churches of which one

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[49] Lightfoot, p. 132.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid., p. 144.

[52] Ibid.

reads in the New Testament. The Independents claimed that no such arrangement was evident, that the city church governments were congregational in structure;[53] and so a stalemate was reached amid flaring tempers. In the course of this exchange the Assembly turned back again to the subject of church censures and excommunication. About this Goodwin remarked:

> 2. That the presbyterial government makes two sorts of churches: one, merely for discipline, the other for worship: and so they have different ends and different notions also, being considered as particular, and as combined.
> 3. Discipline doth not constitute a church, nor is it a note of a church: and that that is the church, doth not communicate in the discipline neither.[54]

William Bridge further contended that the church spoken of in the New Testament was not a presbytery, synod, or national church, but a "particular congregation only, and yet that it had the power of the highest censure, without appeal; therefore every particular congregation, consisting of elders and brethren, should have entire and full power and jurisdiction within itself."[55]

As the debate went on Nye cautioned against the danger of a government within a government coming into being if the full Presbyterian system were given full sway.[56] Something needed to be done in order to overcome the impasse created by Independent-Presbyterian wrangling. So, a committee for

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[53]Lightfoot, pp. 150-51; Hetherington p. 172.

[54]Lightfoot, p. 151.

[55]Hetherington, p. 173.

[56]Ibid., p. 174.

accommodation was appointed on Friday, March 8. The Presbyterian representatives were Lazarus Seaman, Richard Vines, Herbert Palmer, and Stephen Marshall. Goodwin, Nye, Burroughes, and Bridge represented the Independent cause.[57] Some accord was reached, and the committee reported out the following basis of agreement on March 14:

> 1. That there be a presbytery, or meeting of many neighboring congregations' elders to consult upon such things as concern those congregations, in matters ecclesiastical: and such presbyteries are the ordinances of Christ, having this power and authority.
> 2. Such presbyteries have power in cases that are to come before them; to declare and determine doctrinally what is agreeable to God's word; and this judgment of theirs is to be received with reverence and obligation as Christ's ordinance.
> 3. They have power to require the elders of those congregations to give an account of any thing scandalous in doctrine or practice.[58]

Further, on March 21, Stephen Marshall reported for the committee two more points of agreement:

> 1. An addition was put to the first proposition, put in before; viz. that 'at these meetings let them pray and preach, handle practical cases, or resolve hard questions.'
> Fourth proposition. The churches and elderships being offended, let them examine, admonish, and, in case of obstinancy, declare them either disturbers of the peace, or subverters of the faith or otherwise, as the nature and degree of the offence shall require.
> 5. In case that the particular church or eldership, shall refuse to reform that scandalous doctrine or practice, then that meeting of elders which is assembled from several churches and congregations, shall acquaint their several congregations respectively, and withdraw from them, and deny church-communion and fellowship with them.[59]

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[57]Lightfoot, pp. 206-07; Shaw, Vol. I, p. 171.

[58]Lightfoot, pp. 214-15. [59]Ibid., p. 229.

This would seem to have a Presbyterian appearance and an Independent effect, at least as the Assembly Independents understood their Congregationalism. For they were, as we have heard Nye explain, fully in favor of consultation in synods--even with the possible consequence of denial of "communion and fellowship" to the obstinate offending congregation. What they could not tolerate, the full juridical excommunication, the legal use by a presbytery of the power of the "keys" to "deliver" a congregation "to Satan" once and for all. To explicate further here would be to anticipate the fuller discussion of their thought on these matters in which I intend to engage in the next part of this study. My purpose here, primarily, is the setting forth of the historical and theological context for that thought.

John Baillie gives the only extant account of the actual meetings of the committee for accommodation.[60] He says that four Scottish commissioners also met with the committee.[61] His account runs as follows:

> 'We have meet some three or four times alreadie, and have agreed on five or six propositions, hoping by God's Grace to agree in more. They /the Independents/ yield that a presbytrie, even as we take it, is ane ordinance of God which hath power and authoritie from Christ to call the ministers and elders or any in their bounds before them to account for any offence in life or doctrine, to try and examine the cause, to admonish and rebuke, and if they be obstinate to declare them as ethnicks and publicans, and give them over to the

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[60]Shaw, Vol. I, p. 242.

[61]Baillie, Vol. II, p. 147, also cited in Shaw, Vol. I, p. 171.

> punishment of the magistrates; also doctrinally to declare the mind of God in all questions of religion with such authoritie as obliedges to receave their just sentences; that they will be members of such fixed presbytres, keep the meeting, preach as it comes to their turne, joyne in the discipline after doctrine. Thus far we have gone on without prejudice to the proceedings of the Assemblie.'[62]

Baillie's account would seem to give the Presbyterians more cause for rejoicing than the official report of the committee as recorded by Lightfoot. In any case, the whole attempt at accommodation, which showed some promise of fulfillment, was of necessity abruptly dropped because the question of ordination was pressing.[63] This was a practical matter. Parishes were in need of ministers in the chaotic period of the 1640's, and Parliament needed (or at least requested) advice on how to create them, given the fact of the breakdown of the episcopal system of ordination.

By April 3, 1644, the committee of the Assembly charged with the matter of ordination had completed its work on the doctrinal grounding of the rite. Twelve propositions were drawn up, which, after further debate, were reported on the floor of the Assembly on April 10. The first three read as follows:

> 1. Prop.[osition] The Scripture doth hold out a presbytery in a church; 1 Tim. iv, 14, Acts xv. 2. 4. 6.
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> 2. Prop.[osition] A presbytery consisteth of

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[62]Baillie, Vol. II, p. 147, also quoted in Shaw, Vol. I, pp. 242-43.

[63]Shaw, Vol. I, p. 242.

> ministers of the word, and such other public officers as are agreeable to, and warranted by, the word of God to be church-governors, to join with the ministers in the government of the church; Rom. xii. 7, 8, I Cor. 12:26.
>
> 3. The Scripture holds forth that many congregations may be under one presbyterial government. Proved by instance of the church of Jerusalem.[64]

This third proposition was to draw the Independents' particular ire. So vehement was their opposition to sending the twelve propositions to Parliament for ratification that on the motion of Stephen Marshall they were laid aside for the time being.[65] The Assembly went back to discussing instances from the New Testament church, as to whether they proved Presbyterianism or Independency. Then ruling elders were brought up for discussion again. Following this five days of debate centered around this proposition: "'No single congregation, which may conveniently join together in an association, may assume unto itself all and sole power of ordination.'"[66] The Independents protested vehemently, but, as usual, lost the vote.[67]

The Assembly committee's report, read and then temporarily dropped in April because of the Independents' objections, was brought to the attention of the Assembly again on November 8, 1644, by Dr. Burgess. The Independents dissented from the

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[64]Lightfoot, p. 243.

[65]Lightfoot, p. 250; Hetherington, p. 178.

[66]Lightfoot, p. 262.

[67]Hetherington, p. 179.

third proposition concerning presbytery,[68] and the report was given to the House of Commons that day as The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines . . . concerning Some Part of Church Government.[69] On November 11 the House of Lords heard the report, and the next day the Commons debated the points contained in it. "At the commencement of the debate Mr. Holland presented to the House the petition of the Dissenting Brethren against the propositions concerning presbytery, desiring liberty to bring in their reasons of dissent."[70]

By December 20, 1644, the Assembly had nearly finished its Directory for Worship, its plan for church government, and its answer to the Dissenting Brethren's reasons. A resolution was then put through for beginning a "directory for the practical part of discipline and government."[71]

The Lords and Commons debated worship and government with thoroughness and zeal. Masson tells us:

> January 1644-5 was the great month. On the 4th of that month an Ordinance from the Commons passed the Lords, abolishing the use of the Prayer-book, adopting and confirming the new Westminster Directory, and ordering it to be printed. On the 23rd of the same month, the following Resolutions were adopted by the Commons:--
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> 'Resolved: That there shall be fixed Congregations--that is, a certain company of Christians to meet in one assembly ordinarily for public worship: when

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[68]Lightfoot, p. 324; Shaw, Vol. I, pp. 180-81.

[69]Commons' Journal, III, 691; Jeremiah Whittaker's Diary, p. 343 both cited in Shaw, Vol. I, pp. 180-81.

[70]Shaw, Vol. I, pp. 180-81.

[71]Ibid., p. 250.

believers multiply to such a number that they cannot conveniently meet in one place, they shall be divided into distinct and fixed Congregations, for the better administration of such ordinances as belong to them, and the discharge of mutual duties.

'Resolved: That the ordinary way of dividing Christians into distinct Congregations, and most expedient for edification, is by the respective bounds of their dwellings.

'Resolved: That the minister and other Church-officers in each particular Congregation shall join in the government of the Church in such manner as shall be established by Parliament.

'Resolved: That these officers shall meet together at convenient and set times for the well-ordering of the affairs of that Congregation, each according to his office.

'Resolved: That the ordinances in a particular Congregation are Prayer, Thanksgiving, and Singing of Psalms; the Word read, though there follow no immediate explication of what is read; the Word expounded and applied; Catechising; the Sacraments administered; Collection made for the Poor; Dismissing of the people with a Blessing.

'Resolved: That many particular Congregations shall be under one Presbyterial government.

'Resolved: That the Church be governed by Congregational, Classical, and Synodical Assemblies, in such manner as shall be established by Parliament.

'Resolved: That Synodical Assemblies shall consist both of Provincial and National Assemblies.'[72]

The Lords followed suit; and so on January 28, 1644/5, England became by act of Parliament officially Presbyterian.[73] The Assembly's directory for excommunication was then pressured through quickly by the majority in February of 1644/5. A paper of formal reasons of dissent was submitted to the Assembly by the Independents. Four sessions of debate over the Independents' reasons and the Assembly's answer occurred February 4-7.[74]

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[72]Masson, Vol. III, pp. 173-74. [73]Ibid., p. 175.

[74]Shaw, Vol. I, p. 254.

When the document containing reasons and answer was completed it was submitted to Parliament. It was not until January 24, 1647/8, that, on order of the House of Lords, it was officially printed. Both the Reasons . . . and the Answer . . . had, however, been printed unofficially in London at the time of their composition as a part of the ongoing pamphlet warfare between Presbyterians and Independents. Thomas Goodwin for the Independents and Jeremiah Whittaker for the Presbyterians inspected the official copy, as compiled by Adoniram Byfield. The 1647/8 printing, then, was done under this title: The Reasons Presented by the Dissenting Brethren against Certain Propositions concerning Presbyterial Government; Together with the Answers of the Assembly of Divines to Those Reasons of Dissent.[75]

Further detailed reporting of the Westminster Assembly's deliberations would seem unnecessary here. The Independents had made their points forcefully by this time. A few more highlights are of note for our purposes. Cromwell's success, in obtaining on September 13, 1644, a parliamentary order to the Assembly for finding some means whereby "tender consciences" (i.e., the Independents) could be "borne with," greatly alarmed the Presbyterians, particularly Baillie. It was a portent of things to come.[76] Parliament further incensed the Presbyterians

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[75]Hetherington, p. 191.

[76]Masson, Vol. III, pp. 168-69.

by passing an ordinance which in part provided for Commissioners in every Province for the judging of cases of ecclesiastical "scandal." This interposed a heavily Erastian note.[77]

Finally, however, this was in part rescinded.[78] And the Parliament, more and more estranged from the real power which had developed behind the state--the Army--and influenced by London Presbyterians and by an Assembly of Divines increasingly remote from the real religious leanings of the great body of Englishmen, held to a Presbyterianism which never realized its ideal of a national Church except on paper.[79]

Regular sessions of the Assembly were held until February 22, 1648/9. After that weekly sessions with small attendance were held until March 25, 1652. The purpose of these irregularly-attended meetings was the examination and ordination of candidates for the ministry. There was never any formal dissolution of the Assembly. The Scottish commissioners had gone home in 1647.[80] The Independents had long since ceased attending by the time the last session was held in 1652 by a handful of Presbyterian stalwarts.

B. The Dissenting Brethren in the Commonwealth and Protectorate Periods

I have been primarily concerned with the Dissenting Brethren at the Westminster Assembly. Therefore, I shall not attempt

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[77] Ibid., p. 405; Shaw, Vol. I, pp. 288-89.

[78] Masson, Vol. III, p. 423.

[79] Ibid., pp. 692ff.; Haller, pp. 341-42.

[80] Schaff, Vol. I, p. 753.

to trace in detail their relations to that phenomenon--the Protector Cromwell's reign--which constituted the closest approach which England ever made to having a Congregational state. The Dissenting Brethren did not add basic substance to their theory of the church in this era. They consolidated gains, and spelled out through actions their thoughts on state-church relationships. Most of what needs to be said here has already been alluded to--in my comments on Champlin Burrage's observation about the Congregational alternative to episcopal church government,[81] and in my biographical sketches of the Dissenting Brethren. The surviving Dissenting Brethren fully supported Cromwell, and held high places during his reign. As we have seen, several were "Triers," exercising what supervision there was during these years. Further, Goodwin, Nye, and Simpson participated in a committee headed by John Owen in 1654 which presented to Parliament a list of sixteen broad fundamentals of religion which should be required of sects seeking toleration.[82]

The differences of the Dissenting Brethren from the Elizabethan Separatists are seen perhaps most clearly here, in that they have no hesitation about cooperating with a government-sponsored church administration when that administration is favorable to their ideals. Cromwell's "church" was no national church in any generally accepted sense of the term. Rather, it was more of a loose supervision of externals,

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[81]Above, pp. 60-61.

[82]Hetherington, pp. 289-90.

a paternalistic attempt to insure that a chaotic situation did not get impossibly out of hand. Under this guidance, which as Triers the Dissenting Brethren helped to administer, Independency was free to develop its congregational agencies of church government according to the theory which it had espoused with varying degrees of intensity since at least the early part of the seventeenth century, and probably before that. And toward the end of the Interregnum the Dissenting Brethren cooperated with John Owen and other leaders of the movement to set forth in the Savoy Declaration their mature thought on Congregational theory and polity.

PART III. THE THOUGHT OF THE DISSENTING BRETHREN ON THE CHURCH: COVENANTED CONGREGATIONALISM AND DIVINELY-ORDAINED POLITY

CHAPTER VII

THE INDIVIDUAL POSITIONS OF THE "FIVE" ON THE CHURCH

A. Thomas Goodwin on the Church

Thomas Goodwin's construction of church polity--of the organization of a church by congregations, offices and officers--was to him direct outgrowth of his doctrine or theory of the church, of his vision of a church which conformed with what Scripture clearly taught. Scripture, he believed, teaches a new covenant between God and man in Christ. It also teaches a covenanted church as the instrument through which the implications of that covenant may be worked out in the lives of God's faithful ones. It is an instrument wherein the grace of God revealed in Christ may be applied to believers in such a way as to effect a transformed existence filled with love, joy, hope, and moral rectitude for those who participate. The church, then, is a covenanted community of the Covenant.

The Church of England in which Goodwin was nurtured from childhood had obviously not attained this state, however. The first reformers of the Reformed English Church had all they could do, Goodwin realized, to purify the national Church from the centuries of bondage to popery. Goodwin was at one with his Puritan contemporaries in having little good to say for "Rome" and for all the abominations this term represented to

him. The first reformers, then, were to be praised for setting the church in England back on the right doctrinal track. This they had succeeded in doing, and Goodwin approved of the Calvinist direction in which they had led the Church of England doctrinally.[1] Again, in common with other Puritans from Bishop John Hooper to those of his own day, he contended that the task of reform, begun well, was far from complete. Much needed to be done, and those who now had the opportunity could not be allowed to falter. He exhorted his Puritan associates vigorously: "Purge and reform the temple, though you die for it in the doing of it. . . . Do you your duty, and save your generation (as David is said to do)."[2] And also:

> Now, after this first day's work of throwing down heathenism and Jewism, then came a night of popery, which was set up in the room thereof. What will Christ do before he hath done? He will have a second day's work, and will not cease till he hath thrown down every rag, all that dross and defilement that antichrist and popery brought into the world. We now are under the second day's work, we are working up still to a purer world; it is still this new world, working up to its perfection; and Jesus Christ will never rest till he hath not only thrown out all the dross of this world, both of doctrine and worship, which conformity to the world hath brought in.[3]

Goodwin, then, sees a process of religious evolution at work, and is eager to hasten it on. He is much less critical

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[1]"Zerubbabel's Encouragement to Finish the Temple," a sermon in Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XII: Sermons (1866), p. 110.

[2]Ibid., p. 126.

[3]"The World to Come; or, the Kingdom of Christ Asserted," two sermons, the second of these (untitled), Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XII, p. 95.

than his Separatist forebears about the present state of the Church of England. His is hopeful, reasonable, optimistic even, about what it may yet become, given the progress it has made to date. Complacency about the present state of Christ's church in England is, however, the last thing he would counsel. He explains thus:

> As for the great things of the gospel, matters of faith or doctrine, they /i.e., the first English reformers/ had so happy a hand therein that there is to be found little if any hay or stubble therein; but in matters of order, which concern worship or discipline (for so the apostle distinguisheth, Col. 2:5, 'faith and order'), let it be inquired into whether they were so exact therein. Although this must be said, that God did take care for all fundamental ordinances of his worship, and it is a bitter error and full of cruelty to say, We have had no churches, no ministers, no sacraments, but anti-christianal. God's first and chief care was to build up his church mystical, to make men saints, and he hath made glorious ones in his personal walkings with him; and to that end he made a plentiful provision in matters of faith, even from the very first. It fell out in this case as in a new plantation, which if men were to make in another world, and so to begin the world anew, their first care would be to provide necessaries for their subsistence as they are men; to have corn for bread, cattle for meat, and the like; but matters of order and government they think of afterwards, and often fall into the right by seeing their errors by degrees. Think not much, therefore, that men call for (as most men do) a reformation of some things amiss in matters of worship and discipline, or an addition of some things; perhaps a candlestick or some other utensil or ordinance of church worship, is found wanting.[4]

Here, then, is no bitter and stinging condemnation of all that now is in the Church of England, together with an urgent call to come out from all uncleanness, in the manner of the

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[4]"Zerubbabel's Encouragement . . . ," Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XII, p. 110.

Elizabethan Separatists. The leadership of the Independent cause had mellowed by the early 1640's, and sensed itself to have more in common with the Puritan cause generally than did the Separatists, who reserved some of their most caustic comments for those among the Puritan-leaning Anglicans who would not go all the way with them.[5] Here, rather, is a plea for improvement, for pressing on together in the task of further reform, further conforming of the pattern of the Church of

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[5]Barrow, for instance, has this to say of them in A Brief Discoverie of the False Church (Carlson, ed., The Writings of Henry Barrow: 1587-1590, p. 264):

"Many mourners there would seeme in these times for Tzion, who (good men) can take no rest for sleeping, ease, and bellie cheare: faine they would have all things well, but they neither refraine from the pollutions, nor cry out against the abhominations of the times: . . . so shall they not be spared by the avenging angels that carrie the instrumentes of dissipation in their handes."

Church of England parishes should be abandoned immediately, Barrow states, for "fower principall and waighty causes:

1. The fals maner of worshiping the true God. Esaias 66:17; Deuteronomy 17:1.

2. The profane and ungodlie people receved into and retayned in the bozom and bodie of ther churches. Esaias 65:11, 12.

3. The false and antichristian ministrie imposed upone ther churches. Numbers 16:21, 35.

4. The false and antichristian government wherwith ther churches ar ruled." (Four Causes of Separatism, Carlson, ed., Barrow: 1587-1590, p. 54)

Barrow continues:

"The haynous and fearfull enormities that insue of these are infinitt and cannot be sufyciently expressed ether by word or writing; but sumarylye, you shall find herbye Christ Jesus denied in all his ofices, and so consequently not to be com in the flesh. You shall find herby the last will and testament of our saviour Christ abrogat, his pretious bodie and bloud torne and troden under feette of dogges and swine, Christ Jesus throwne out of his howse and antichrist his enemie exalted above God and rayning in the temple of God as God." (p. 54)

England to the pattern of Christ's church found in the New Testament. And it is couched in what would appear to be deliberate understatement, so as perhaps to win by soft words points which the shrill contentions of an earlier generation of Independent-Congregational leaders had failed to carry.

Besides being at one with the Puritan movement of his day in calling for further reform of the Church of England, Goodwin shares with the Puritan movement a commitment to the old and new covenant scheme, mentioned earlier in this study.[6] The contrast between Adam and Christ is drawn:

> God created man according to his image, you know, at first, (and certainly had you lived with Adam, you would not have known how you could have been happier.) A glorious creature he was; he had the image of God drawn upon him, he was God's herald, he had his arms upon his breast. On a sudden, after God had drawn this picture, he dasheth it, he breaketh it in pieces, strikes out all he had done. What was the reason of this? He meaneth to make it up better, he meaneth to frame upon man the image of Christ, and make him like unto him. 'You bore the image of the earthly, but I will make a better image for you; you shall bear the image of the heavenly, you shall be changed from glory to glory.' Thus he goes over his work again, after he had spoiled the first.[7]

Then the old and new covenants, the covenants with Israel and with the Church, in Christ, are spoken of--in terms of the old covenant and new "dispensation." First, the Jews:

> Go, take his chosen people, the Jews; they were the only nation, his darling; theirs were the oracles of God, the promises, the covenant, and they were all in all with him for many thousand years. Why? He scatters them,

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[6]Above, pp. 3-7.

[7]Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. I: An Exposition of the First Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians (1861), pp. 198-99.

> breaks them all in pieces; the ten tribes he carrieth captive away long before the two tribes, and then the two tribes. And when he had thus scattered them all, what is his promise? . . . He will gather them together in one again.[8]

And then the covenant with the church in the "fullness of time":

> I am now to come to the time when this great dispensation began, when God did break up his decrees that he had lain hid from everlasting in his breast, and ordered the dispensation and administration of things to his Church;. . . . There was certainly a fullness of time when Messiah should be born, when all things should be gathered in the person of Christ in one. . . .[9]

The Scripture, Goodwin points out, asserts that this church to which the long-hidden dispensation is now given is the body of Christ,[10] and has Christ for its head.[11] This is meant in various senses. "There is, first, the church universal, which is the whole body of Christ upon earth; and there is a church in particular, as you heard of the church of Corinth, and you have heard it exemplified by the church at Jerusalem."[12]

> Again, for a second distinction, our Lord and Saviour Christ hath a sacramental body. Saith the Apostle, I Cor. 6:24, speaking of the bread, 'This is my body, which is broken for you.' And he hath a ministerial body, which is an assembly of his children incorporated to enjoy ordinances. I Cor. 10:17, speaking of the church of Corinth, 'You,' saith he, 'are one bread, and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread.' This is a ministerial body to Christ. As he hath a universal church, a mystical body, whereof

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[8] Ibid., p. 199.

[9] Ibid., pp. 200-201.

[10] Ibid., p. 559.

[11] Ibid., p. 549.

[12] Ibid., p. 542.

> only his saints are members, so he hath a ministerial body, which is his ordinance, which are saints incorporated and made one, either really or verbally; really, by eating that one bread as the Apostle saith. . . . There is a sacramental body, that is, the bread which is broken. There is a ministerial body, which is the ordinance of church-fellowship.[13]

The body of Christ, then, is, in its visible, organized, institutional aspect, most emphatically a particular congregation. It is this of which Christ is the head. A diocese is not the body of Christ; neither is a presbytery, synod, or assembly of a national church. The body of Christ, the church in the primary sense, is that to which the ordinances are entrusted. This assembly of believers acts as Christ's body in dispensing his benefits to believers. Goodwin explains:

> Nothing is or may be reckoned the Church of Christ but what may be called a distinct body to Christ. Now then, take many congregations united together in one under a diocesan bishop, you must make that one man the church and a body to Christ. Take likewise many congregations united in one under many ministers, you must make these ministers met together the body of Christ. Now then, the rule I shall give you will be fair and easy. In Matt. 18:17, there our Saviour Christ doth first let fall the institution of a particular church;. . . . And I speak to the church in hand, for it is a church not only for prayer and the sacraments, but for discipline, for he speaks of one that is to be cast out. 'If any man offend,' saith he, 'go tell the church.' Now by church here he cannot mean the universal church, that is plain. Why? Because you cannot call all the men in the world together that are saints to tell them;. . . . What then is meant by church, for he speaks of a new institution under the New Testament?
> . . . . . .
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> Now, look what was familiarly called a church by the apostles, look into the Acts, and from thence to the end of the Revelation,--that which, I say, is usually

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[13] Ibid., p. 559.

> called a church, and is a particular church, a body to Christ, certainly this is the church Christ meaneth; . . .[14]

Particular churches are "filled" by Christ with those spiritual blessings necessary to the Christian life--the word, the sacraments or ordinances, discipline or censure of the erring. Christ, Goodwin says, had a "threefold fulness." First a personal fullness: the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him. Secondly, a "dispensatory fulness": we receive of his fullness, he dispenses grace to us. Third, a "relative fulness."

> /This arises/ from a relation to his church. He is the head, and the church is his body. And, as if you would make a man, you must not only have a head, but you must have a body, or it is not a perfect man; so if you would make up Christ--take Christ mystically,--you must not only have the person of Christ, but there must be a body too; and so there ariseth a perfect full stature of Christ, as the Apostle calleth it, I Cor. 12:12.[15]

In a secondary sense, therefore, the "particular" church, the local congregation, not only serves as the central agency through which Christ dispenses that grace or power of love necessary to salvation, but also in the process of serving it actually fulfills his "stature," that is, completes his work, by constituting his body. The Covenant of Grace is hereby personalized, applied, actualized in this particular relationship.

It would stand to reason, then, that if a group of people finds itself in such a position, with such a responsibility, that it would take all necessary steps to ensure that it is so

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[14] Ibid., pp. 553-54.

[15] Ibid., pp. 561-62.

organized that it will be able to fulfill its role completely. They must see to it that there exist among them "joints and bands that make members so knit together and firmly joined, that you may as well break a bone in the midst as break them."[16] Such joints and bands are: one body and spirit, with Christ and one another; one faith; one love; and "one covenant, and the seals confirming that covenant."[17]

Thus we have passed in our survey of Goodwin's thought on the bases for churchmanship from the old covenant with Israel, to the new covenant with the church through Christ (i.e., with the universal mystical church of all the saints, known only to God), to God's covenant in Christ with particular local churches. Here, in particular church-covenant, we find the link between the general theory or doctrine of the Covenant of Grace and the theater in which that covenant is to be actualized.

Goodwin speaks at some length of the grounds of Scripture by which persons are "joined together in one congregation by holy covenant."[18] First, there are the Old Testament examples of covenant. Then there are the various instances of the renewal of Israel's covenant.[19] And further, there are the New

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[16]"The Government and Discipline of the Churches of Christ, Set Down by Way of Questions and Answers, with an Explanation and Application of Them," Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XI: The Constitution, Right Order, and Government of the Churches of Christ, &c. (1865), p. 486.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid., p. 490.

[19]Ibid., pp. 490-91.

Testament instances of persons being "joined together by covenant in church fellowship."[20] Of a covenant Goodwin says that "the making of it constitutes a church."[21]

Next Goodwin gives several reasons for formally covenanting together in a congregation. First, he says, it is of the very nature of the church to do so. The church is called the spouse of Christ; and a spouse enters a marriage by way of a covenant promise. Also, the church is called "the city of the living God." If this is so, then the members are citizens of this city.[22] "Now citizens enter into a covenant together to keep the laws and maintain the liberty of the city, therefore, the church is a city, must enter in by covenant."[23]

Second, a covenant is necessary because of "the power of the church to call her own officers."[24] Officers in the congregation must be chosen by the consent of the congregation. Otherwise they will have no power, no authority. Church officers have only such power and authority as the members freely give them by their consent in a covenant agreement.[25] The third reason follows closely then. The church has power only over its own members, who have freely willed that it be so. Outsiders are not in any way subject to the power of church admonition or exclusion, that is, of censure or discipline.[26]

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[20] Ibid., p. 491.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., pp. 491-92.

[24] Ibid., p. 492.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid.

And the fourth reason follows from the nature of the sacraments. They are said to be seals or confirmatory signs of a covenant.[27] Finally, the covenant is a three-way obligation: "God is one party, the member another, the church the third."[28] The order for "such as desire fellowship with the church" is "first to enter into covenant with the congregation."[29] The purpose "of this uniting together in covenant is to worship the Lord, and to edify one another in all his holy ordinances."[30] And herein is a specific distinction from other, personal, secular, or governmental, types of covenants. "Herein the church differs from other assemblies, that may be godly men, and may meet in one place and be in covenant; for so may a commonwealth, but a church always meets for spiritual works."[31] The church has clearly-defined God-ordained purposes, and covenants to fulfill them.

John Goodwin, the brother of Thomas, whose relationship to the more orthodox leaders of developing denominational Independency was--as I have noted--strained, disapproved of this virtual requirement for a formal church covenant in a congregation. There is extant correspondence between him and Thomas Goodwin over the matter. At the time of writing Thomas is

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[27] Ibid. Specific Scripture references are given by Goodwin in the text of his work for all of these points. It has not, however, seemed profitable to burden this study with such continual citations.

[28] Ibid., p. 493.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

still an exile in Holland, serving as minister of an Independent church. If there is some degree of estrangement between them, one of John's opening statements is hardly calculated to alleviate it: "I profess in the sight of God, and in as great singleness and simplicity of heart as ever man in this world spake word unto you, that I do as clearly apprehend error and mistake throughout the greatest part of your way as I do truth in this conclusion, that twice two makes four."[32]

John Goodwin refers to the institution of the church covenant as the "head" of Thomas Goodwin's "way."[33] He says that it is imposed in all the Independent churches with which Thomas and his friends are associated.[34] He criticizes Thomas and his associates for taking scriptural warrants too literally. The fact that something is found in the New Testament does not necessarily make it a requirement for the present day. The selling of lands and giving the money to the church, or greeting each other with a holy kiss are not, for instance, practised by the Independents. All things which were convenient or important in New Testament days are not so at present.[35] The covenant is one of those items. It is too much magnified by the Holland Independents, too much "indispensably urged."[36]

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[32]"Two Letters . . . Concerning a Church Covenant," Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XI, p. 528.

[33]Ibid., p. 529.

[34]Ibid., p. 530.

[35]Ibid., pp. 530-31.

[36]Ibid., p. 531.

Even the New Testament does not prove the church covenant's invariable necessity, John Goodwin says. Peter added three thousand to the church in one day. It is absurd to imagine that they all took the covenant.[37] Baptism rendered a person immediately eligible for church membership, without the necessity for a covenant besides.[38]

John Goodwin becomes now more unpleasant about the matter. It is not simply a minor disagreement over whether or not the covenant is absolutely necessary. He considers the institution actually an evil. He says that it is not lawful before baptism, and not necessary after.[39] It is an "unchristian usurpation" of men's consciences to impose this binding confessional tie on church members.[40] It has the effect of partitioning off the particular congregation from fellowship and communion with other congregations. It is an exclusivistic thing.[41]

John prays that Christ will give Thomas Goodwin light to comprehend the darkness into which he has sunk.[42] Thomas Goodwin is, of course, offended by this letter. He defends the practices of the Holland Independents in their churches regarding the matter of church covenants. He says that John grossly exaggerates the presumed complexity of their church

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[37] Ibid., pp. 531-32.

[38] Ibid., p. 532.

[39] Ibid., p. 533.

[40] Ibid., p. 534.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid., p. 526.

covenants. Rather than the detailed confessional statements which John apparently imagines, their church covenants are simply "an assent and resolution professed (by them to be admitted by us), with promise to walk in all those ways pertaining to this fellowship, so far as they shall be revealed to them in the gospel."[43] It is a means to further "mutual relation,"[44] and in no sense a wall of separation from other like-minded churches.[45] It is a means of obligating men to special duties in a particular congregation--men who by virtue of their acceptance of the Covenant of Grace were members of the church catholic before they took this covenant.[46] The purpose of the covenant is "to form up and knit fast" the "special relation of church fellowship."[47]

An important summary statement is contained in this letter (prior to the parting accusation of pride on the part of John, and assurances of Thomas' "faithful, loving" friendship nonetheless[48]), which clearly sets forth the distinction between the general Covenant of Grace and the particular church covenant based on it:

> Nor yet is this covenant the renewing that solemn general covenant of grace entered into at conversion, where the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper are the

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[43] Ibid., p. 536.

[44] Ibid., p. 537.

[45] Ibid., pp. 536-37.

[46] Ibid., p. 537.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid., p. 540.

> seals which you mention as bands sufficient;[49] but this covenant is but a particular covenant, and so a branch of that general one, and but to oblige unto the duties more properly and specially pertaining unto this fellowship, though all this in the virtue of the general covenant; and therefore (as you say truly) the common band of our mutual interest in the same God, in the same baptism, &c., do bind us to all those duties, yet that hinders not a special particular covenant to be made upon some special duties upon various occasions, even as particular leases and compacts use to be made out of some general charter;. . . .[50]

There are, for Thomas Goodwin, detailed and specific Scripture-based implications for Church polity in all this basic theory or doctrine of Covenant of Grace and particular church covenant as a branch of that general covenant. There are ways in which the church should and should not be organized. Goodwin spends the better part of his rather lengthy work Of the Constitution, Right Order, and Government of the Churches of Christ[51] spelling out these implications. Much in these hundreds of pages is highly repetitive. I shall attempt here to extract the important points, and take note also of some relevant corollary material from his Exposition of . . . Ephesians, in the seventeenth-century edition of his Works.

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[49]This would seem to contradict what I have noted Thomas Goodwin saying above, in the tract entitled "The Government and Discipline of the Churches of Christ," wherein he clearly gives as a reason for having a particular church covenant the fact that the sacraments are seals of the covenant. Apparently what he is trying to say, taking the two statements together, is that the sacraments are signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace as it is applied to individual lives; and that the institution of church covenant is especially important because it points up or symbolizes for the believer his personal participation in that covenant of which the sacraments are seals and signs.

[50]Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XI, p. 538.

[51]Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XI.

A basic starting point may well be the recognition that for Thomas Goodwin the "power of the keys"--the ecclesiastical power of church censure or discipline so important to seventeenth-century churchmen--was given by Christ only to those "settled in the order of a church,"[52] that is, to "saints" (church members who had professed a conversion experience and had covenanted to "walk" together with others in righteousness) united in a Congregational church.[53]

Worship and discipline were conceived to be twin pillars of the life of a congregation. Seventeenth-century churchmen (Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists alike) spent a great deal of time and energy worrying about the problem of censuring--and, if necessary, weeding out--the "scandalous" offender in matters of both doctrinal deviation and personal conduct. Personal purity and growth in righteousness were aided, the Independents felt, by keeping the surroundings of the Saints pure. Scandalous sin could easily ruin that setting in which mutual covenant obligations were best carried out. And churchmen of other persuasions were similarly concerned about moral and doctrinal purity as they conceived these. So when Goodwin shows himself to be concerned about the locus of church censuring power, or, in extreme cases, of the power of excommunication, it is not just the marginal concern which it might immediately seem. Indeed,

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[52] Ibid., p. 63.

[53] Ibid., p. 65.

difference of opinion between Independents and Presbyterians over the methods and results of censure and excommunication became intense, increasingly bitter, even vitriolic, in the course of the debates of the 1640's.

"Ministerial" power, the power to declare the mind of Christ in a church censure situation, is vested, for Goodwin, in the people gathered with their elders. Here is the seat of power.[54] It is a particular church which is appointed for worship and discipline.[55] Scriptural references to being reconciled to a brother, to telling the church, and to the use of three witnesses, all point to a particular congregation, rather than to some judicatory beyond this.[56]

Saints and elders together make up the church.[57] Officers are set in the church, but they do not equal the church.[58] Every local church, that is, every covenanted particular church, is the seat de jure of pastors, teachers, elders, and all the officers necessary to proper church administration. No judicatory above and beyond this is appointed to be the church in this primary sense of exercising the power of Christ over believers. There is a "sufficiency of eldership" in a Congregational church.[59]

Men should not ordinarily, Goodwin says, seek to govern

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[54] Ibid., p. 78.
[55] Ibid., p. 67.
[56] Ibid., p. 75.
[57] Ibid., p. 79.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., p. 80.

beyond the scope of their preaching ministry, that is, beyond the circle of believers for whom they have been given direct pastoral responsibility. The extent of church power, he says, is commensurable with the extent of mutual relations.[60] The bounds of a functioning church in the New Testament understanding are therefore the bounds of a particular congregation. Church government is not to be patterned after city government or civil government, as some have sought to do.[61]

Rather, one must look to the New Testament pattern, and here the church of Corinth offers the clearest example. It conforms to Matthew 18:20 ("Where two or three are gathered together," etc.). The church of Jerusalem is a relevant pattern also; but application of this pattern to the present is complicated by the fact that the apostles were its governors, and their commission was special, unique, and universal.

Apostleship was a once-only office. Apostles were chosen "by the Will of God immediately."[62] Goodwin explains thus:

> Apostleship was an Office extraordinary, appointed for a time for the first rearing and governing the Church of the New Testament, and to deliver that Faith which was but once to be given to the Saints (as Jude speaks) and the Apostles are therefore entitled the foundation the Church is built on, Ephes. 2:20 which Office accordingly has many extraordinary Priviledges annexed to it,

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[60] Ibid., p. 81.

[61] Ibid., pp. 81-82.

[62] [Thomas Goodwin the Younger, Thanckful Owen, and James Baron, eds.] The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D., Sometime President of Magdalene Colledge in Oxford, Vol. I: An Exposition on the First, and Part of the Second Chapter, of the Epistle to the Ephesians . . . (London: Printed by J.D. and S.R. for T.G., 1681), p. 6.

> suited (as all the Callings by God, and his Institutions, are) to attain that end, which was so extraordinary: As namely unlimitedness of Commission to teach all Nations, Matt. 28:19. They likewise had an Infallibility and unerringness, whether in their Preaching (a), or in Writing (b), which was absolutely necessary for them to have, seeing they were to lay the Foundation to all Ages, I Cor. 3:10. Although in their personal walkings they might err, as Peter did, Gal. 2:11. And further, they had Authority and Jurisdiction committed to them, as Elders in any Church, where Providence should cast them, II Cor. 11:18. together with Authority and Power therein, II Cor. 4:21 and II Cor. 10:18. . . .[63]

Certain men came to Ephesus claiming to be Apostles, and they were found to be liars.[64] Just so, certain men claim an apostleship by succession in the present day, says Goodwin, and an examination of them for the biblical signs of an Apostle--miracles, wonders, mighty deeds confirming their preaching--will easily show up the false presumption of their claim.[65]

In Corinth, however, Paul leaves the believers to the exercise of their own power inherent in their status as a duly organized Congregational church.[66] The ordinary New Testament pattern of church government is shown here. Paul leaves Corinth detailed instructions. They at Corinth are to have the power of judging doctrine, of ordering worship, of excommunicating when necessary. The congregation at Corinth is called a church. It consists of visible saints (i.e., professed believers)--I Cor. 1:2; 14:33. It is entire and complete within itself for all

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[63] Ibid., p. 1.

[64] Ibid., p. 6.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., p. 82.

purposes for which a church is organized. It is a "whole lump--I Cor. 5:6." It is a particular congregation, a fixed company with set bounds and elders placed over it--I Cor. 11:33; 1:12; 9:12; 14:23; and it has the power to judge those within these bounds--I Cor. 5:13.[67]

The highly regrettable but sometimes necessary act of "delivering" an unrepentant sinner "to Satan"[68] was to take place within the congregation of which he was a part, and where his "scandal" was known first-hand, not in a presbytery removed from the local situation--I Cor. 5:13.[69] A presbytery cannot act as the church because it is not the church, except perhaps in a secondary and derivative way. In the New Testament, the term church is reserved exclusively for the gathering of "saints" in a particular place. No gathering beyond this is called the church. There is no place where the term "church" means elders meeting alone, such as is the case in a presbytery (in the seventeenth century).[70] If the presbytery is not a church properly so-called, neither is a diocese governed by a presumed successor to the apostles. Such a construction of church government is simply a grave misreading of the New Testament.

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[67] Ibid., p. 83.

[68] Goodwin and his associates took the "power of the keys" quite literally, in common with others of his day.

[69] Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XI, p. 85.

[70] Ibid., p. 88.

Returning now to Of the Constitution . . . of the Churches of Christ, we find Goodwin claiming that not only the churches of Corinth and Jerusalem provide patterns of Congregational churches, but also the church of the Colossians "demonstrates congregational churches to have been by the primitive institution of Christ."[71] His argument is that Paul writes to the Colossians as if he is writing to a whole church; that he addresses their ministers as if they were in a "fixed" relation to one church; and that if there had actually been several churches there, related presbyterially, Paul would have distinguished them and their ministers in his writings.[72]

Further, Paul addresses the church at Philippi as if he were speaking to one congregation meeting in one place. Also, the church of Antioch "was an entire church, having government within itself."[73] All of Paul's and Barnabas' relations here are in the context of one congregation. If when relating to them he was actually relating to several congregations, themselves related presbyterially, surely he would have left some indication which would have been recorded in the text of the Acts. And so, in this same vein, Goodwin goes on to prove to his own satisfaction that the churches of Troas, Galatia, Laodicea, and Thessalonica were Congregational in constitution,

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[71]Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XI, p. 101.

[72]Ibid.

[73]Ibid., p. 102.

and not "classical."[74]

Goodwin follows this assertion with a display of what comes at least close to simple denominational pride. He sets forth multiple reasons why the Congregational constitution of church government is most ideally suited to the various conditions of time and place in which the saints find themselves throughout the world.[75] But he does not leave the necessity for Congregational church government resting on such a dubious base for long. He next asserts in emphatic terms the institution by Christ of the Congregational form of church government, and this only.

The Holy Ghost, Goodwin says, has "appointed the extent of elders' jurisdiction over their own flocks, and to extend to every soul therein in particular, even over the whole flock wherein they are elders, and that as a whole flock, importing an entire body of persons committed to them."[76] "If the seat of worship and government be commensurable, and of equal extent, then a single congregation, as it is the seat of worship, so of government."[77] In other words, elders in a congregation have by Christ's appointment full power and authority over the spiritual lives of those committed to their jurisdiction, and over these only. They do not have power or authority over those committed to the elders of another congregation; nor do

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[74] Ibid., pp. 102-04.

[75] Ibid., pp. 106-112.

[76] Ibid., p. 121.

[77] Ibid., p. 139.

elders from elsewhere have such over those committed to them--as is the presumed case when a representative district body of elders meets to hear appeals, pass judgments, and make rules which will be binding on members of local congregations for which they do not have direct responsibility (i.e., when a presbytery or "classis" meets). Goodwin says that "the extent of a like kind of power any further [than the local congregation], or over any other, ought much more to have a special institution [i.e., a biblical warrant from Christ], which so far as it wanteth and cannot produce and shew the bounds for, from institution, so far it is a nullity."[78]

Goodwin, of course, finds no such scriptural warrant or "institution" for presbyterial government. He has to his own satisfaction effectively undercut Presbyterian arguments with his proofs that the New Testament city churches were Congregational, and his repeated assertions to the effect that it is both unscriptural and unnatural for elders to attempt to exert disciplinary authority beyond those bounds within which they have been entrusted with pastoral responsibility over the members of a covenanted flock of Christ. The Presbyterian theorists of Goodwin's day, quite naturally, relied heavily upon the arguments (again, heavily proof-texted) that the city churches of the New Testament were Presbyterian in form, and this by the appointment of the Apostles; and that "classical"

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[78] Ibid., p. 121.

church government was the Christ-ordained way.[79]

> In the conclusion of the whole [Goodwin says], I infer from this assertion chiefly these corollaries.
>
> 1. That our brethren of the presbyterian way, if they would prove and establish their several orders, and classical, &c. assemblies, they must shew us institution for them.
>
> 2. And in this agitation let those that can produce out of the New Testament the truest, genuine, natural evidences of the bounds of an instituted church, as the seat of the officers and government, carry it.
>
> 3. That an instituted church, according to the true and lawful bounds thereof, being the seat of the priviledge, all power of elders and officers is to be drawn down thereto, in the exercise thereof; and in the case of defect, elders are to be chosen to such a church, and not that church taken in to other elders, and also all acts of jurisdiction are to be exercised therein.[80]

Given the fact, then, that the local particular congregation is the locus of primary power and authority in the church, is there not, for Goodwin, some use to be seen for secondary structures of churchmanship beyond this level? There is indeed. We have already noted the Independents' resentment

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[79]These points were made repeatedly against the Independents by the various spokesmen for the Presbyterian position at the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Of the several extant records of the Westminster Assembly which I have had occasion to call attention to, this is perhaps most clearly shown in the Notes of Proceedings of The Assembly of Divines at Westminster, by George Gillespie (see n. 14, Chapter VI). This account is shorter than the other accounts of the Assembly, and hence was not of use in providing information about the work of the Dissenting Brethren there which was not already covered more fully by the other accounts. It does, however, emphasize the Presbyterian side of these arguments under such titles as: "First Argument for Presbyterial Government from the Example of the Church of Jerusalem" (p. 27); "Christians of Divers Languages in Jerusalem Who Could Not Be One Congregation" (p. 30); "That the Many Congregations in Jerusalem Were One Church" (p. 31); "Of the Elders and Presbytery of Jerusalem" (p. 33); "That the Apostles in Jerusalem Did Act as Elders in a Presbytery" (p. 34); "The Instance of the Church at Ephesus for Presbyterial Government" (p. 51); etc.

[80]Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XI, p. 131.

of their opponents' accusation that Independency involved total independence from other churches[81]; and Philip Nye's explanation in the Assembly of Divines that for the Independent party synods may have their proper place, and even be seen to be instituted by Christ.[82] Similarly, Thomas Goodwin has positive things to say about synods, rightly-understood.

First of all, Goodwin makes the point again that appeals in disciplinary cases beyond the local situation are not necessary. They are not necessary by the "law of nature." This he illustrates from instances of: government in early Old Testament times; government under the Jews in more organized eras; the government of Geneva; matters of life and death in England, where sentence is pronounced locally; and the same in democracies.[83] Secondly, appeals are not necessary: (1) before a sentence of excommunication, because the local congregation has full power in Scripture to pronounce such, and to appeal would be to interfere with that power; and (2) after sentence of excommunication, because the sentence itself is "decisive" and "irreversible," "as being bound in heaven, unless the person repents, and upon his repentance is restored again"[84]; and "because a particular church, by yielding to such appeals would give up that power and authority with which Christ hath entrusted them."[85]

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[81]Above, p. 21.

[82]Above, p. 101.

[83]Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XI, pp. 232-33.

[84]Ibid., p. 233.

[85]Ibid., pp. 233-34.

There are, however, partial exceptions to this; and this is where synods take their proper place, within clearly defined limits:

> As we acknowledge elective occasional synods of the elders of many churches, as the churches have need to refer cases of difference to them, so in cases of maladministration, or an unjust proceeding in the sentence of excommunication and the like, we acknowledge appeals or complaints may be made to other churches; who being offended may, as an ordinance of Christ, judge and declare that sentence to be null, void, and unjust; and that not simply, as any company of men may so judge, giving their judgments of a fact done, but as an ordinance of Christ in such cases, and for that end sanctified by him to judge and declare in matters of difference. And the church and eldership of a particular church, that proceedeth so unjustly, ought to look at this their determination as an ordinance of Christ to them; and, entertaining it as such, more sadly to review their own act and proceedings, to consider the grounds which the synod gives why it is unjust, and themselves ought to acknowledge it such, and receive the brother again, with acknowledgment of their sin, and of the wrong done him; yet not with an implicit faith, because the synod that so determined, as having a greater power from Christ to restore the man.[86]

For purposes of Congregational theory in confrontation with Presbyterian, the last, rather awkwardly-put sentence in the above paragraph is probably the most important. The synod meets on special occasion--though not regularly. The complaint is heard. The complainer is, perhaps, upheld in his grievance; and judgment is passed against the offending church. But all this does not imply the synod's <u>superior</u> power or jurisdiction. Representatives gathered in the synod may request the neighboring churches which they represent to withhold fellowship and communion from the offending sister church, as a means of moral

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[86]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 237.

persuasion. And the neighboring churches may consent to do so, and may even receive into fellowship with themselves the wronged party.[87] But none of this in itself serves to exert a juridical action upon the offending body of believers. As strongly as it may be worded--and as intense as the "public opinion" pressure may be against the offender--the judgment is nevertheless advisory only. The synod has declared the original judgment null and void in its estimation; but it has not reversed it within the primary locus of ecclesiastical power--the congregation. The congregation must take to heart the judgment of the synod and do this itself. Goodwin spells this out sharply:

> We deny them [i.e., a synod] to have power to rescind a sentence, but only doctrinally to judge a sentence of excommunication to be void and unjust. Now the power to rescind a sentence, according to the acceptation of the words, imports . . . an act of the same kind of ministerial power that gave the sentence. It imports the same power to make it void that did establish it; yea a power containing in it all that the inferior hath, and is withal superior to it.[88]

And this implication is for Goodwin against the scriptural pattern of a church.

In major cases the Christian magistrate may be appealed to in the same manner as synods, in a Christian commonwealth; and in extraordinary cases he may require the offending church, which he judges to be in the wrong, to revoke its sentence against the offended person. A chaotic situation may thus be

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[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid., p. 238.

avoided in particularly difficult cases of disagreement.[89] But as for synods, they have no such power to require anything; nor may the synod presume to deliver to Satan the offending synod or classis as a body. For this shifts the locus of final juridical power in disciplinary cases to the synod and away from the particular congregation.[90] There is no such superior power in synods. They are not "such fixed and solemn courts of judicature."[91]

At this point Goodwin explains further his conception of the power of the keys. There are, he says, outward and inward aspects to the sentence of excommunication. Outwardly the church casts out the offending brother from its communion and fellowship. Inwardly, it must be assumed, there is a "binding in heaven" which accompanies the sentence. That is, God performs a "judicial act" "when the church hath ministerially sentenced the man aright."[92] The offender is thus delivered to Satan. The man is bound in heaven upon judgment of the congregation. No higher court of the church can, therefore, reverse this. Upon due deliberation the synod can declare the sentence in its estimation null and void, and can receive the reprieved person into the fellowship of one of the churches represented there, as I have pointed out. But it cannot compel the sentencing church to reverse its sentence and

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[89]See above, pp. 60-61, 111.

[90]Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XI, pp. 238-39.

[91]Ibid., p. 239.

[92]Ibid.

receive again the brother.[93] Goodwin does seem to allow that if the church has been quite wrong in its judgment God will not proceed with the binding and delivering to Satan.[94] Also, he uses that wonderful qualifying phrase, "in some sense," in reference to the binding process.[95] Apparently he deems it proper to stop somewhat short of tying down God's actions utterly in these matters.

Having made the point and expounded upon it at some great length that churches or congregations are not legally bound together through subordination to classes (presbyteries), synods, or national assemblies considered as superior forms of the church,[96] Goodwin hastens to add that this does not imply strict independence from each other of neighboring churches. Rather, there should be a close communion of an entirely voluntary kind between these churches, as a means of recognizing that they are parts together of the mystical church universal:

> We acknowledge that by virtue of the consideration of the church universal, whereof each congregation is a part, and by virtue of churches being in a nation of the same language, under the same civil government, or living in the same neighbourhood, and being of the same judgment, there is to be a great and near communion to be entertained between all such churches, and according to such respects. . . . and such is the nature of this communion, as it will oblige all churches one to another in a multitude of mutual duties, which, if observed, may help to preserve churches from running into confusion,

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[93] Ibid., pp. 239-40.

[94] Ibid., p. 240.

[95] Ibid., p. 239.

[96] Ibid., pp. 240-60.

> may rectify miscarriages, preserve them from errors, and may salve all those inconveniences which use to be objected against this assertion, of placing only political power in congregational bodies.[97]

One indication that such voluntary mutual consultation was in fact practised among the early Congregationalists is, as I have noted earlier, the basic similarity between church covenants of several congregations.[98] This interrelationship of Christians beyond congregational boundaries Goodwin says is a form of the communion of saints. He also refers to it in terms of the "duties of catholic communion."[99] Such communion may involve the sharing of temporal goods, i.e., the giving of alms to needy neighbor congregations; or it may and should include an attempt to agree in doctrine as far as possible.[100] It should also include consultation between the elders of neighboring congregations when one congregation is choosing a new minister.[101] A caveat is, however, entered here:

> But that will not arise to this, that the neighbour-ministers have the power of ordination, the power of deposition, or that they have a negative vote, by way of jurisdiction, to which the church must, by virtue of an institution, submit; they may give the right hand of fellowship; and it may be a due, ex debito fraternae charitatis, from the duty of brotherly love, that a church, when it chooseth its elders, should ask the right hand of fellowship from other churches; but it must be remembered that it is but giving the right hand of authority to choose their elders, or to lay hands on them.[102]

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[97] Ibid., p. 261.

[98] See n. 25, Chapter III.

[99] Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XI, p. 261.

[100] Ibid., p. 269.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Ibid., pp. 269-70.

Always Goodwin carefully stops short of anything which might imply adherence to the Presbyterian system. "Independency," however, if taken very strictly, is, as the Dissenting Brethren themselves said,[103] a misnomer for what Goodwin is representing here. For the system he advocates does much the same thing on a voluntary basis as Presbyterianism does on a legally-binding one. Goodwin would have claimed that the spiritual quality behind the voluntary system makes all the difference--that is, reflects the spirit of Christ in the New Testament, whereas the legalized Presbyterian system does not. In fact, of course, Goodwin's detailed insistence upon the Christ-ordained de jure aspect of the Congregational system rendered his "church-way" little less legalistic in practice than that informed by the Presbyterian outlook. Within early Independency there seems to have been the general expectation that the Holy Spirit would lead sincere seekers after scriptural truth in substantially the same directions; and bitter recriminations sometimes followed from one brother-in-the-Lord's conviction that another brother had deviated from acceptable orthodoxy--as witness the cases of George and Francis Johnson, in an earlier era of Independency's history, Sidrach Simpson and William Bridge at Rotterdam,[104] John and Thomas Goodwin, in the exchange of letters just noted, and John Cotton and Roger Williams.

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[103]See above, p. 21.

[104]See above, pp. 78-79.

Congregational theory of the church implied, for Thomas Goodwin, a definite organization of the local "particular" congregation. The "church mystical is the general assembly of all saints on earth united in Christ to him, and one to another."[105] "And the church instituted is a particular assembly of saints on earth, united in Christ by a special covenant."[106] The particular "instituted" assembly participates in the nature of the universal church; and this consideration provides the over-all bond which prevents the Congregational way from consisting of simply atomized, utterly individual units:

> Because there is the same reason every way of the body mystical, and of the body instituted, therefore the same privileges every way which appertain to the whole body mystical do belong also as fully to every such particular church, so as indeed they are one; that is, there is unica et eadem ratio, one and the same consideration of the one and the other, as there is the same nature of a drop that is of the ocean, since both are water, the one as well as the other. Therefore the apostles do so promiscuously speak the same things of the one and the other, and in their discourses pass without much distinction, from the one to the other. As he that reads an anatomy of the body of man in general may be said to read it of every man in particular, so what is said of the invisible church may be said and applied to the visible. As the one is called the body of Christ, so is the other. Yea, as the one is called the whole body of Christ, so is the other. So of the church of the Corinths he says, 'when the whole church of Christ is come together in one place': For the church of Christ is totum homogeneum, an homogeneal whole, whose parts are of the same nature with itself; and so what is said of the whole is said of every part.[107]

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[105] Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XI, p. 288.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid., pp. 289-90.

This could be taken two ways. It could be taken as a buttress for the assertion that the local Congregational church, because it is wholly at one with the universal mystical invisible church of Christ, participates fully in all things appertaining to the church. This is undoubtedly the way Goodwin intends it to be taken. Implied here also, however, may be--whether Goodwin consciously intends it or not--a certain felt necessity to deal with and justify the fact that when the Scriptures speak of the "church" it is not really as clear as he has claimed earlier in this work that a particular Congregational church is necessarily indicated. The Apostles, he says, "promiscuously" shift from one level of meaning for the term "church" to another, without any clear distinctions. He attempts to turn the point to his own advantage. But it is not a great step further to the admission that the Apostles may have intended the term "church" to apply equally to levels of assembly in between the universal mystical church and the local church (to the "Council of Jerusalem," for instance)--an admission which would, of course, if Goodwin made it, undercut his case and give up the field to the Presbyterians.

An "instituted" church, in which "the saints are joined into one body," is "a body ordered, not confused."[108] This "order" includes: (1) "an enjoyment of all ordinances instituted

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[108] Ibid., p. 297.

by Christ, according to Christ's laws"[109]; (2) and "the ranking and ordering all their members into such proper offices, according to their gifts, that all those ordinances might be enjoyed, and all gifts among them, to the utmost, be improved to the use of the whole."[110] Together these elements of order go to make up a "true gospel church," which is "a company of saints assembling together in one place, built by a special covenant into one distinct body, which, as occasion is, is to be fitly ordered to enjoy constant fellowship with Christ in all his ways and ordinances, to their own mutual edification, and the glory of God through the Spirit."[111]

This last sentence, embedded in the text of Goodwin's long work, and not especially noted by him, is, it seems to me, a very important definitional statement. For it draws together and points up the major elements of what Goodwin and his Independent tradition are trying to say about the church, and does this in one succinct statement. Goodwin is often verbose, obscure, and awkward in his phrasing. Here he is very lucid. There are all these elements involved in churchmanship, he is saying: (1) a true church; (2) a gospel church (i.e., one fully conforming to the scriptural pattern); (3) a company of "saints" (i.e., self-professed called-

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[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid., p. 298.

[111] Ibid., p. 301.

out or elect believers); (4) assembled in one place (i.e., a distinct, clearly-bounded congregation); (5) built or knit together, formed, constructed by a "special covenant" into "this one distinct body" (the covenant being sharply set forth here as the constituting element); (6) "fitly ordered" (i.e., properly, most scripturally and reasonably organized); (7) for the purpose of enjoying "constant fellowship" with Christ through the use of his ordinances in the "way" he has appointed; (8) with the result of "their own mutual edification"; and (9) the showing forth of the "glory of Christ"; (10) all this through the work of the Spirit underlying the whole enterprise.

Those who would suspect early Congregationalism of being vague or hazy and unorganized in its churchmanship compared with Presbyterianism, Anglicanism, or Roman Catholicism should be confronted with such a definition as this, or those contained in John Owen's The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government (1689), for a thorough refutation of such a suspicion. Early Independency knew very definitely what it meant by the term "church," and where its definition conflicted with other major definitions in its day. Goodwin spelled this out further in terms of the "matter," "form," and "cause" of the church:

> 1. The true, and only true matter of this church, is saints visibly obeying Christ; and a true profession of this is the only true adequate note of the matter of it.
>
> 2. The special relation which they have to Christ, and one to another in this way, and the fellowship with

> Christ and with one another, is the true form of a church. The mutual agreement [i.e., the church covenant] works that special relation, and is the instrument of conjoining this matter and form.
>
> 3. The order and right administration of the ordinances and disposing of members is the *forma externa*, the external form of this body; the blessed Spirit, that acts and breathes in all, is the *forma assistens*, the assistant form; and their own edification and God's glory, through Christ their head, is the final cause of this particular visible instituted church.[112]

One of the recurrent Presbyterian (and Anglican) complaints against the Independents in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was that their gathered churches resulted in disorder in the larger church--that they constituted schism from the body of Christ. In answer Goodwin contends "that Jesus Christ hath given liberty and power to his saints to embody themselves into congregational churches," and that "in doing so, they are not guilty of sinful separation or schism."[113] He argues that "as the saints and members of Christ's mystical [sic] are only fit matter for this church, so they have an immediate independent power and authority from Jesus Christ, their immediate head and king, to gather and combine themselves into such an assembly, without expecting warrant from any governors whatever on earth."[114]

This is in fact, Goodwin says, the scriptural way of setting up church organization, the Congregational way. It can hardly be schism from Christ's body, even though it is

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[112] *Ibid.*, pp. 301-02.

[113] *Ibid.*, p. 302.

[114] *Ibid.*, p. 303.

deviation from previously existing organizations (presbyterial or episcopal), if those organizations are not rightly ordered in the first place. For, "ministers make not a church, nor are they or their power requisite to the first gathering of it."[115] That is, bishops or ministers gathered in presbyteries, synods, or general assemblies do not have the authority to organize a church. Also, Christ has given two or three saints "immediate power" to "begin this fellowship," with all the rights and obligations appertaining to it.[116] Further, the Apostles would not have believers wait for the magistrate in the organization of a church.[117] Finally, Christ as immediate king of his church exercises that kingship directly in his church through his saints, without the mediation of a magistrate.[118] The similarity of these considerations to those put forth in other circumstances by the Elizabethan Separatists is obvious, and argues strongly for the point of an essential continuity between the earlier and later phases of Independency in their basic doctrine of the church.

God in Christ has ordained specific officers for his church, Goodwin points out. These are, first of all, the extraordinary officers--apostles, prophets, and evangelists. These were indispensable in the first setting up of the church of Christ in New Testament times. Their offices have, however,

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[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Ibid., pp. 303-04.

ceased with the passing of those appointed to these original purposes. Goodwin does allow, however, that Luther and Calvin come close to illustrating a revival of the apostolic offices, though not quite. They were in any case endowed with special gifts for the work of reformation.[119]

Next there are the "ordinary" offices, the bishops (elders) and deacons.[120] The order of bishops is divided into: (1) pastors and teachers, and (2) ruling elders. The pastors attend to preaching or "exhortation"; and the teachers or doctors attend to the teaching of doctrine.[121] They are of equal authority in the congregation, and share the administration of the flock with the ruling elders. They both attempt to "comfort the people of God"[122] (i.e., engage in pastoral work).

Ruling elders are to "assist the pastors and teachers in diligent attendance to all other aids of rule besides exhortation and doctrine."[123] These are:

> 1. To open and shut the doors of God's house by admission of members, by ordination of officers, by excommunication of notorious and obstinate offenders;
> 2. To see none live in the church inordinately without a calling, or idle in their calling;
> 3. To prevent and heal offenses, whether in life or doctrine, that might corrupt their own church, or other churches also, if their counsel be required;

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[119]"The Government and Discipline . . . ," Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XI, pp. 497-99.

[120]Ibid., p. 499.

[121]Ibid., p. 502.

[122]Ibid., p. 504.

[123]Ibid., p. 505.

> 4. To prepare matters for the church's consideration, and to moderate the carriage of all matters in the church assemblies, as to propound matters in the church, and to order the seasons of speech and silence in the church;
>
> 5. Finally, to feed the flock of God by a word of admonition, and, as they shall be called, to visit and pray for their sick brethren.[124]

The deacons are "to receive the offerings of the church which are brought unto them, and laid down before them, and therewith to serve tables, distributing with simplicity, not only to the ministers of the church, but to any other of the brethren, as their needs shall require."[125] In other words, they are to pay the salaries of the pastor and teacher, and engage in whatever charitable relief work they may find necessary or advisable in the congregation. Associated with them may be "widows" or deaconesses. Their particular virtue is to be the showing of compassion to those in need of it.[126] Relief work, then, was not to be limited to financial matters. A widow must be a "painful" woman, that is, a conscientious person who is able to "take pains about a sick body."[127] Nursing of the ill, and "tenderness and affection to those in misery" were involved.[128]

Finally, all the brethren of the congregation are called, whether they be in specific offices or not, to show "brotherly love, and the fruits thereof, brotherly unity, brotherly equality, and brotherly communion."[129]

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[124] Ibid.

[125] Ibid., p. 512.

[126] Ibid., p. 515.

[127] Ibid., p. 516.

[128] Ibid.

[129] Ibid., p. 521.

One further consideration should be noted here. We have seen that in the Assembly debates the Independents made a point of distinguishing the offices of pastor and doctor or teacher, while the Presbyterians contended that they were virtually identical.[130] Just so Goodwin makes a point of this difference in his writings. Pastor and teacher are the "superior officers" in the church, he says. And they are "co-ordinate" (equal) in rank. But "God hath shared and divided gifts of prophesying between them."[131] The pastor is to "attend on exhorting"; and the teacher on teaching doctrine, to be sure. But both will preach, the pastor emphasizing what is according to his gifts and mission, and the teacher according to his. The pastor preaches to bring the believer to a sharper consciousness of the centrality of Christ to his life, of his commitment implied in his conversion. And the teacher brings out the doctrinal implications of this.[132] The sacraments are seals of one's personal covenant with Christ, and so are administered by the pastor, whose job it is to preach of this covenant. But they are also signs for teaching purposes, and so are administered as well by the teacher.[133]

Christ administers the congregation through all these offices and officers, for "by this distribution of officers,

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[130]Above, pp. 96-97.

[131]"Of the Constitution . . . of the Churches of Christ," Goodwin's Works (1861-66 ed.), Vol. XI, p. 336.

[132]Ibid., p. 337.

[133]Ibid.

there is a communication of all the offices of Christ:"[134]

> (1) The pastor represents the priestly office of Christ. For he, by the word applied, slays the old man, and presents the new creature to God.
> (2) The teacher represents the prophetical office of Christ.
> (3) The kingly office of Christ is more eminently seen in the ruling elder. . . .
> This suits with all the needs of a church: their understandings are the teacher's pupils; their wills, the pastor's; their lives, the charge of the elders.[135]

B. William Bridge on the Church

I have spoken earlier in this dissertation[136] of Perry Miller's characterization of the general tendency of Puritan covenant or "federal" theology in the seventeenth century to modify a sterner original Calvinism so as to provide more of an assurance of salvation; and an opportunity for pleading the covenant and one's inclusion in it as a ground for hope of salvation--practically storming the gates of heaven with a polite but firm reminder to God of his covenant promise. Critics of Perry Miller, I have shown, have demonstrated that covenant theology was not as original with the Puritans as he perhaps thought.

Whatever the truth of this criticism of Miller may be shown to be by yet another generation of writers on the problem, we may see in the writings of William Bridge a prime example of the type of Puritan dealing with the covenant of which Miller and others speak. He deals with this aspect of

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[134] Ibid., p. 342.

[135] Ibid.

[136] Above, pp. 9ff.

covenant theology much more than does Goodwin, and speaks of its application to the realm of the church covenant and the congregation in much less detail than Goodwin (although he does not entirely neglect the subject either).

First, we may see that Bridge, in good Puritan fashion, deals a crushing blow to "Rome" and all it represents. It is not entirely clear from his writings that he necessarily means only the Roman Catholic Church. There are hints at least that Laudian Anglicanism is included in the condemnation of "Romish" ways and works. This is shown rather clearly when in his Sermon Preached unto the Voluntiers of the City of Norwich and Also to the Voluntiers of Great Yarmouth in Norfolke he exhorts the troops of the parliamentary army fighting the royalist army in this fashion:

> Beloved, you are now again coming out of Egypt (for the Romish superstition, and that partly is called Egypt, Sodome, Babylon: you are now coming out of Egypt) marching up into the promised Land, and promised Ordinances; nothing can make you fall in the way, but unbelief: wherefore be all of good courage, and pray to the Lord.[137]

In his sermon Babylon's Downfall,[138] preached before the House of Commons, Bridge attacks "Rome" (and again, by implication, Laudian Anglicanism) with a vengeance. He takes Revelation 14:8, "Babylon is fallen, fallen, the great City . . . ," as "a short and sweet prophecie of Romes ruine and

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[137](London: Printed by F.F. for Ben. Allen, 1642/3), p. 19.

[138](London: Printed by I.N. for John Rothwell, 1641).

destruction."[139] And it is quite obvious that he means the Roman Catholic Church and its presumed allies in the seventeenth century, and not the ancient Roman empire. He says that Rome is described in two ways. First, she is described as great, the great City. And she has been great in possessions, revenue, influence over kings and princes, "authority, and power over the Saints, and Churches of Christ."[140] From this greatness she is "much fallen already, and yet too great."[141] Secondly, she is described according to her sins, and called "Babylon."[142] Here Bridge specifically mentions "the Church of Rome," and calls it "Egypt" and "Sodome." He says:

> Egypt was exceedingly harsh, and cruell to the Church, and Israel of God: so are they.
> Sodome was exceeding base, and filthy in corporall uncleannesse; and so are they.
> Babylon full of Sorceries and Idolatrie, so are they. Shee is called Babylon.[143]

The church of Rome, he says, is not a true church. The position that it is is dangerous, and has caused an "abundance of hurt, and mischiefe."[144] Ignorance is the mother of the Papists' devotion; and they would have "the people . . . put off with Mattins, and Even-song." Clearly the practice of the Church of England is here referred to as well as that of Rome. "Consider this also," Bridge warns, "that if reformation be not now wrought, our sinne and guilt will be greater than ever

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[139] Ibid., p. 1.
[140] Ibid., p. 2.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid., p. 8.

it was. This Parliament time is a Commencement time for good or evill."[145]

In his annotations upon the book The Loyal Convert, Bridge states that this task of "purging and reformation" involves the obligation "to pluck downe idolatrous crosses, to silence Organs, to abolish relickes of Popery, to scum off the filth of our Liturgies and Church-service, and to put away out of our Cathedrals, those bawling Boyes, and drunken singing men."[146] A radically Puritan purging, then, of the Church of England is called for, and not simply a few changes in the underlying theory of the church. "Neither is the quarrel," he emphasizes, "for a few ceremonies," but "for substance."

A point should perhaps be underscored here which I have made before, but have not emphasized. The very fact that Bridge and Goodwin and their associates are so vitally concerned to purge the existing church in England, the parish "assemblies," illustrates that the Independents have not entirely given up on the state-church concept. They would apparently like to have the churches of England organized congregationally, but not in the withdrawn-from-the-world manner of the Elizabethan Separatists. A nationwide network of Congregational churches cooperating with each other in

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[145] Ibid., p. 22.

[146] (London: Printed for Edward Husbands, 1644), p. 6.

fellowship and communion, all under the loosely-organized sponsorship of the state, would be quite acceptable to them. Or, if political complications would not allow this and pointed toward a Presbyterian national church, autonomy for their own Congregational organizations within this system would also have been, if certainly not ideal, acceptable.

In any case, there is a two-fold motive at work here in this call for further reformation in the early 1640's. The Independents are concerned, of course, that the eventual outcome of the reformatory activities going on in the kingdom leave them full freedom for the exercise of their own "church-way." But they are acting and speaking not simply as Congregationalists, but also as members of the larger Puritan movement which is locked in a death struggle with the King's armed forces. And in this situation it was not always possible to stick to the theological fine points which ultimately they considered important and even crucial. In the struggle with the royalist forces their closest and major allies were of necessity--in the early 1640's at least--those Puritans who leaned toward Presbyterianism. Further, when they spoke the language of covenant theologians they were speaking a general Puritan language--until they took the further step of applying the theory to the local congregation.

Because of all this the Dissenting Brethren refrained from dissenting constantly. They spoke an irenic and conciliatory word, and attempted accommodation as far as their

consciences would permit. Such a word is this, contained in a sermon by Bridge at a "Publique Fast" of the House of Commons:

> Now beloved in the Lord, there is none of all these three but have some power about Church-affaires, the Magistrate he hath his power, and therefore he is called a nursing Father; the Minister and Elder, he hath his power, therefore he is commanded . . . both to feed and rule; The Congregation hath its power, and therefore well saith that blessed and learned man D. Whitaker . . . : 'If you consider the government of the Church in regard to its Head Christ, so it is Monarchicall; if in regard of the Elders, so it is Aristocraticall: if in regard of the people who have a power to choose their own Officers; it is Democraticall; Whether this power of theirs be a matter of priviledge or of jurisdiction, I dispute not now; but a power they have: a power the People, a power the Minister and Elder, a power the Magistrate; and if your line can be so drawn, as that every one of these three may have that native power which Jesus Christ hath left them by legacie, then have you drawn your line aright: view therefore your ground well.'[147]

In the collection of seven of Bridge's sermons published after his death under the title The Freeness of the Grace and Love of God to Believers Discovered we find him making the standard seventeenth-century Puritan contrast between the old and new covenants. He says:

> Is it not a great mercy, a very great favour, that we that had broken the first Covenant, and had not performed the conditions of it, that we should be set up again as I may say; that God should set us up again, under another Covenant that runs without any condition; and yet so he did.[148]

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[147] A Sermon Preached Before the Honourable House of Commons . . . November 29, 1643 (London: Printed for R. Dawlman, 1643), p. 28.

[148] (London: Printed for Nath. Crouch, 1671), p. 65.

Involved now, he says, are the free grace and love of God in Jesus Christ.[149] The "Arches and Pillars" of this free grace and love are:

1. The absoluteness of the Covenant.
2. That God justifies the ungodly.
3. That our righteousness is not in us but in Christ.
4. That the guilt of our sins by which we lay lyable to condemnation is removed.
5. That a little sincerity covers a great deal of Infirmity.
6. That what God calls ours is not indeed ours, but Gods, as our graces, our duties, which are not indeed ours but Gods.
7. That God will in due time glorify us and honour us.[150]

Even though it is hard to have assurances of salvation, we should not, Bridge says, doubt the fact of it. For it is God's good pleasure to give us the kingdom.[151] But someone may object that not everyone will be saved.[152] Who, then, will be saved? Those that are justified will be saved. Those who will part with all for Christ's sake will be saved. Those who stand at Christ's right hand in this existence will be saved. There is "a working up of the soul unto eternal glory."[153] Those who "are tender to Christ's little ones" and to those "despised in this world" will be saved. "Those that strive together for the Faith in times of affliction . . . shall be saved for ever."[154] "Those that come to Christ in time of

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[149] Ibid., pp. 70-71.

[150] Ibid.

[151] Ibid., p. 75.

[152] Ibid., p. 77.

[153] Ibid., p. 78.

[154] Ibid., p. 79.

Temptation, they shall be saved freely to all eternity."[155] We should be encouraged, Bridge exhorts, by the examples we know of God's mercies to others. We should examine ourselves to see if we have done these things listed. And we should not doubt our salvation.[156]

The nearness to a gospel of works righteousness which the Puritan tradition in some cases came to displaying is evident in this list of conditions which Bridge attaches to the fulfillment of that promise which he has said is without condition. What saves the system from being this only is--in the eyes of the Puritans themselves at least--the underlying appeal to the covenant promise of God. Because God has entered into covenant with his people and promised free grace in Christ, we should "come with boldness for salvation, since it is so free."[157]

Bridge pleads the promise of the Covenant in eloquent terms. It really becomes a matter of God's and Christ's honor and integrity, of their living up to the terms of the Covenant:

> O let none be discouraged, but let it stir us up . . . to plead for it, if it be free; Is salvation free, and will not poor sinners come to receive it? Come, O come freely for salvation, Christ Jesus is willing to make good his own name, and this is his name, he is called Jesus, and he shall save his people. This is the will also of my Father, that you should come unto

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[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid., p. 80.

[157] Ibid., p. 81.

> me, John 6. Christ Jesus hath now salvation in his hands, and will you not come and ask for it? But methinks I see salvation in your faces; methinks I hear a voice among you, saying, What shall we do to be saved?
>
> In answer to which thus: Believe in the Lord Jesus, and venture your salvation upon him.[158]

In 1649 William Greenhill, John Yates, and William Adderly published an edition of the Works of William Bridge.[159] In volume one were included: (1) The Great Gospel-Mysterie of the Saints Comfort and Holinesse, Opened and Applyed from Christ's Priestly Office; (2) Satan's Power to Tempt; and Christ's Love to, and Care of His People Under Temptation; and (3) Thankfulness Required in Every Condition. In this first volume more is said about assurance of salvation through the promise of the covenant. Here it is seen to be almost an insult to Christ to doubt whether one is included in the company of those who at the last will reap eternal benefit from Christ's saving work. The doubter asks: "How shall I know that Jesus Christ hath satisfied for me?" And the answer comes: "Why not for thee?"[160] "Applying the promise makes it thine." "Else we are in a worse condition than the Jews."[161]

One is able to feel that one is a part of the covenant people, the elect: "Objection: How shall I know the Lord accepts my duty? Answer If thou find thy heart warm in duty

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[158] Ibid., pp. 80-81.

[159] (3 vols.; London: Printed for Peter Cole, 1649).

[160] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[161] Ibid., p. 17.

or after duty, thy duty is accepted."[162] Perhaps John Wesley read William Bridge somewhere along the line!

The whole matter could hardly be put more plainly or more typically than in this passage:

> Thou maiest now go unto God the Father and say, Lord, thou hast made a Covenant of grace with poor man, and this Covenant of grace is founded upon the Priestly Office, and satisfaction of Jesus Christ; and the Lord Jesus Christ he hath satisfied for me; and the new Covenant promises; that we shall be all taught of God; Lord, I am ignorant, Oh! therefore now, by the satisfaction of Christ let me be taught of thee, that I may be made wise unto salvation. And so again, Lord, thou hast made a Covenant of grace with poor man; this is laid upon the satisfaction of Jesus Christ: The Covenant of grace saies, I will write my Law in your inward parts: Now, O Lord, seeing Jesus Christ hath founded this Covenant in his blood, and I am one of those he has made satisfaction for; Oh! write thy Law in my inward parts that I may do all thy wills.[163]

Christ in his capacity as High Priest cannot refuse a penitent sinner, Bridge states. Simply as God he may, but not as High Priest.[164] Bridge puts it in good business terms: "Ah, we were all going to prison, everlasting prison, chains of darkness, and he comes, and laies down the money, makes full satisfaction to God the Father as our great High Priest."[165] Come, therefore, Bridge exhorts, "and sit down under the shadow of the Lord Jesus Christ."[166]

The hearer of this exhortation will ask just how this is possible. In what situation does one sit under the shadow of

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[162] Ibid., p. 21.
[163] Ibid., p. 19.
[164] Ibid., p. 20.
[165] Ibid., p. 21.
[166] Ibid., p. 23.

Christ and appropriate his work as High Priest, as mediator between God and man? And the answer here, according to Bridge, is that this happens when the "ordinances" are "purely, and evangelically administered" in the particular congregation.[167]

Bridge covers the specific application of the Covenant of Grace in the congregation in his sermon A Vindication of Ordinances.[168] In this he says that "you shall find that these appointments, institutions and ordinances of Christ--baptism, the Lord's supper, particular churches, the ministry, church censures, singing of psalms, and the like--are laid upon such universal and perpetual grounds as to continue until Christ's coming again."[169] The "doctrine of the ordinances" is "the foundation of our religion."[170]

The point about particular churches is especially important here, for at this time Bridge shifts his emphasis from that covenant theology scheme essentially common to all Puritan thought of his day to that appropriation of it peculiar to the Congregational Puritans or Independents. In the Revelation to John, Chapter 1, Bridge points out, there is the vision of the Son of Man walking between seven golden candlesticks, which are seven churches. This shows, he says, "that thus

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[167] Ibid., p. 88.

[168] Bridge's Works (1845 ed.), Vol. IV.

[169] Ibid., pp. 133-34.

[170] Ibid., p. 139.

Christ would appear unto his people in the way of churches after John's time, in the times that were to come."[171] Christ, furthermore, sends an angel to testify in the churches (Rev. 22:16)--"not in the church in general, but in the churches."[172] Also, in I Timothy 3-6 Paul gives directions about ordering the churches with bishops, elders, deacons, and widows, and commands that such order continue until the return of Christ. Such ordering, then, "is still to continue, and therefore particular churches and congregations for public worship are still to continue."[173]

C. Jeremiah Burroughes on the Church

Jeremiah Burroughes wrote a major commentary on the church-government controversies of his day, entitled Irenicum, to the Lovers of Truth and Peace. Heart-Divisions Opened in the Causes and Evils of Them: With Cautions That We May Not Be Hurt by Them, and Endeavours to Heal Them.[174] In this he contends that it is a false extreme to claim either that all forms of religious expression must be tolerated, or that only one may be. A reasonable middle ground is called for.[175] The magistrate is an officer of God "in the generall Government of the world," but does not have jurisdiction within the church.[176]

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[171] Ibid., p. 134. [172] Ibid.

[173] Ibid.

[174] (London: Printed for Robert Dawlman, 1646).

[175] Ibid., pp. 18-19. [176] Ibid., p. 21.

This, however, does not mean that he is to keep hands off religion entirely. He ought, rather, to aim at being "usefull to Christ's Government in his Church, and for the good of his Church."[177] He should require that the ministers do their duties when he observes them derelict.[178] His power is civil, but it includes the obligations toward the church of "removing the outward things that hindered," and "applying outward meanes, of keeping from outward evils."[179]

Burroughes thus joins the other Dissenting Brethren and the Independent movement generally in seeing the magistrate's power as a court of last appeal when the freedom or peace and order of the church are at stake. The magistrate is to be arbiter when disputes get out of hand, and is to prod the church officers into properly exercising their functions if he observes laxity. He, however, is not to act as a church officer in enforcing the peculiar discipline of the church. This would do no good, Burroughes claims; for coercion in matters of conscience is of no avail. It only brings an outward show of conformity. Hence the Presbyterian legally-enforced "discipline" is not as effective as some think; and the Congregational form of discipline is in the long run more effective--because it is a direct appeal to conscience, from a person's immediate close associates. This matter of discipline is perhaps the major point of difference between

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[177] Ibid.

[178] Ibid.

[179] Ibid., p. 26.

Presbyterians and Independents, Burroughes says. It is actually the reason for organizing the church one way or the other. Both groups join a substantial body of traditional Calvinist thought in seeing it as a virtual "note" of the church. The quarrel is over the means (and the locus) of enforcement.

The Congregational system of discipline stands on this premise: "The vertue of spiritual power works not upon the outward man, but by its prevailing upon conscience; therefore so far as men are conscientious, so far it works, and no farther."[180] Burroughes sets forth the Congregational system of discipline, in distinction from the Presbyterian, as it applies beyond the local church, in these six succinct points:

> First, those in the Congregationall may acknowledge that they are bound in conscience to give account of their wayes to the Churches about them, or to any other who shall require it; this not in any arbitrary way, but as a duty that they owe to God and man.
>
> Secondly, they acknowledge that Synods of other Ministers and Elders about them are an ordinance of Jesus Christ for the helping of the Church against errors, schismes and scandals.
>
> Thirdly, that these Synods may by the power they have from Christ admonish men or Churches in his name, when they see evils continuing in, or growing upon the Church; and their admonitions carry with them the authority of Jesus Christ.
>
> Fourthly, as there shall be cause, they may declare men or Churches to be subverters of the faith; or otherwise according to the nature of the offence, to shame them before all the Churches about them.
>
> Fiftly, they may by a solemne act in the name of

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[180] Ibid., p. 43.

> Jesus Christ refuse any further communion with them, till they repent.
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> Sixt/h/ly, they may declare, and that also in the name of Christ, that these erring people or Churches, are not to be received into fellowship with any the Churches of Christ, nor to have communion one with another in the ordinances of Christ. Now all this being done in Christ's name, is this nothing to prevaile with conscience?[181]

Thus the point is illustrated here again that Independency was far from independent in the thought of its adherents. A complete system of connectional churchmanship is outlined. It simply stops short of juridically-binding enforcement of negative judgments against erring individuals and congregations. For this is not, according to the Independents, what the gospel is about. To force conformity when the conscience is not convinced is to deny the love-oriented principles of Christ. Church authority is not analogous to state authority. It does not function in the same legalistic and coercive manner.

The highest authority in the church is exercised when "the Officers of Christ . . . act in the Name of Christ."[182] The Presbyterian brethren, however, Burroughes says, will add a seventh step to the six just outlined. This is the power of the synod to deliver to Satan.[183] And "in this very thing lyes the very knot of the controversie, between those who are for the Presbyteriall, and those who are for the congregationall way, in reference to . . . the meanes to, reducing from, or

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[181] Ibid.

[182] Ibid.

[183] Ibid., p. 44.

keeping out errours and heresies from the Church.[184] They say that this puts the sinner out of the Kingdom of Christ, if the synod be right in its judgment, and such a fate will terrify the conscience as none of the prior steps would.[185] But does not the Congregational process in effect do this? Yes, say the Presbyterians, but not effectively, because not "formally and juridically." Why, counters the Congregational Burroughes, do we make such a dividing point of the terms "formally and juridically," when these terms are not in Scripture, and the net effect of our system is the same, at least substantially?[186]

The Presbyterians will object, Burroughes continues, that some will not heed the call to conscience of a synod. And the Independents answer that the same men may well not heed the delivering to Satan. And if the next step is taken, that of calling in the magistrate to enforce outwardly the decrees of the church, we the Independents must say that while we do not question his power to thus interpose his position, we do not judge it right that the church-state system should be so construed as to bind him to enforce church judgments without the opportunity of inquiring into the nature of the situation and himself making an independent judgment on the basis of the dictates of his own conscience.[187]

Burroughes passes now in his treatise to one of the

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[184] Ibid.

[185] Ibid.

[186] Ibid., p. 45.

[187] Ibid., pp. 45-46.

particular marks of a Congregational church, the church covenant, and has this to say in its behalf:

> As for entering into Covenant, It is true, there is such a practice in the Congregationall Churches; and a Covenant either explicite or implicite, I think all acknowledge: that is, there must be some agreement to joyne those together in a body, who formerly were not joyned, to make them to be of such a society, to have power in it for the choice of Officers in this congregation, and to be under the care and charge of those Officers more then members of another congregation: what shall joyne them, if not at least some mutuall agreement to joyne in one body for such spirituall ends as Christ hath appointed this body for, the very nature of a society that is embodyed, carryes this with it; and any farther then this I know none requires as necessary.
>
> Indeed the more explicite this agreement is, the more is the edification. Surely there is no Christian but will acknowledge that the more one Christian opens his heart to another, and binds himselfe to walke in the wayes of Christ with another, the more comfortable it is, and helps to edification; and upon this ground doe the Congregationall Churches practice this.[188]

Here, I would emphasize again, is the very heart of the Congregational system as it was envisioned by the Dissenting Brethren and their allies in Independency. The church covenant is the pivotal point around which their churchmanship is organized; not because of the words of the covenant itself (the document as an affirmation of faith may not necessarily be an impressive exercise in creedal construction), but because it draws together the purposes of the assembled congregation in the light of the Covenant of Grace in which the members all, hopefully, participate, and spells out their marching orders as a distinct body of Christ. It gives them

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[188] Ibid., pp. 69-70.

a vivid sense of apartness for a purpose, a covenanting together, a group promise to undergo toward each other the mutual relations and obligations which life in the Spirit under the Covenant of Grace implies. It makes being a Christian something unique, not just something one is born into the same way one is born a subject of the King, the Parliament, or the Protector. It is analogous to the sense of set-apartness achieved by the practice of adult baptism (or re-baptism, as one might term it) engaged in by left-wing groups in the Continental Reformation, and by the English Baptists. But even here the analogy is not complete, since baptism is an intensely personal experience, and the covenant emphasizes mutual relations.

It is at this point, then, the practice of covenanting together, that we may see sixteenth and seventeenth century Congregationalism's claim to being a distinct and rather unique form of churchmanship attaining validity. The fact that subscribing to the covenant in a twentieth-century congregation of the Independent tradition may well be nothing more than an empty formality[189] should not deter us from realizing that in the early days of the movement it was not so. Such things as the polity-structure of a local church (pastor, doctor, elders,

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[189]Such is, of course, not always the case. The "Covenant of the Congregational Church Established at Banstead, Surrey, 1946," reproduced on page 89 of Daniel Jenkins' Congregationalism: A Restatement (London: Faber and Faber, 1954) shows that the spirit of the original tradition has not entirely died out.

deacons, widows, and a committed congregation) and occasional synods are very important corollaries of this covenanting together under the Covenant of Grace. But taken in themselves they are only the outward shell of the Congregational system as Burroughes and his associates conceived it. The offices and officers exist so that the purposes agreed to in the covenant may be fulfilled.

Burroughes, like Goodwin in his letter to his brother John,[190] takes some pains to assure his readers that the institution of the church covenant, while central to Congregational practice, is not meant as a means of exclusivism, of setting apart the Congregationalists so that they cannot in good conscience offer communion and fellowship to those not completely in agreement with their way. If a sincere convinced man who holds the essentials of the Christian faith but believes that the Presbyterian way of church government is Christ's way finds himself where there is only a Congregational church, and desires to enjoy the ordinances of Christ nonetheless, he should be welcomed into the fellowship.[191] Burroughes then asks whether the Presbyterians would do as much for the Congregationalists. If so, he says, "I make no question then but if we well understood one another, and were of quiet

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[190]Above, pp. 126-27.

[191]Burroughes, Irenicum, p. 70.

spirits, we might live together in peace."[192] For all this irenicism, Burroughes' statement and others in the Irenicum are made somewhat in the spirit of the aggrieved party pleading with the opposition to be as reasonable and accommodating as he is trying so hard to be; and with less than complete confidence that such will indeed be the response of the Presbyterians.

The fact that Burroughes is quite willing to have outward peace with the Presbyterians--to agree to disagree, and co-exist, with the possibility of intercommunion in special situations--does not mean that he has personally lessened the general Independent conviction that their church-way is in the last analysis the way Christ intended for his church. In his work Gospel Conversation, Burroughes states: "Christ's Kingdom is not of this world: that is, The Officers that Christ hath appointed, for the government of His Church, are not of this world, are not to be of this world; but they are all to be by Divine Institution."[193] Further:

> Christ hath made Pastors and Teachers, Elders and Deacons, and Widdows in the Church; and not any new sort can be added by all the men in the world. And therefore it was heretofore, as in Popery, so in Prelacy, they would erect a new kind of Religion (as they cal'd it) more spiritual, and so made the Kingdom of Christ like unto the Kingdoms of the world, and thought that they had power to make as many new Officers in the

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[192] Ibid.

[193] (London: Peter Cole, 1650), p. 143.

> Church as they pleased. Certainly this was a derogation from the kingdom of Christ, they made it too worldly.[194]

Thus Burroughes follows the same practice which we have noticed in the writings of William Bridge, that of lumping together Roman Catholicism and Laudian Anglicanism for a joint condemnation. In the context of the conflicts of the day the term "prelacy" was generally understood to refer to Laudian Anglicanism.

In this same passage Presbyterians do not escape censure. For the "second difference in the Church-Officers from the Officers in the kingdom of the world," he says, "is this, If once they be put into such a place in the Church, they have the ful power of the place."[195] For "a Pastor or a Teacher hath as much Power as any one Pastor or Teacher upon the face of the earth."[196] In other words, superior judicatories as in the Presbyterian system may not overturn the work of the pastor and teacher in their own congregation. Nor may the magistrate do this in purely spiritual things, that is, in respect of the ordinances.[197]

As church-government should be strictly according to Christ's institution, so should church worship. It is not sufficient, Burroughes says, to say that something is not expressly forbidden in Scripture, and therefore permissible.

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[194] Ibid.

[195] Ibid.

[196] Ibid., pp. 143-44.

[197] Ibid., p. 144.

Rather, "all things in Gods worship must have a warrant out of Gods word, must be commanded."[198] This is so because these ordinances were to Christ "a matter of great moment."[199] For instance, in the ordinance of Holy Communion "the Covenant of Grace is sealed," and it must receive a "sanctified" (i.e., especially reverent) use.[200]

One final point on Burroughes: He has the same objection which Thomas Goodwin voiced against "extending that ruling power of Pastors and Teachers our Brethren challenge beyond their charge of feeding by the Word and Sacraments"[201] (i.e., against giving elders participating in presbyteries or synods jurisdictional power over those not directly committed to their pastoral care).

D. Philip Nye on the Church

Philip Nye held substantially the same views on the main issues relevant to the Presbyterian-Independent debate as the other Dissenting Brethren, and, as we have seen, shared with Thomas Goodwin the leadership of the Independent cause in the Westminster Assembly. He did not write as extensively on these points as Goodwin, Bridge, or Burroughes. What little

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[198] Gospel-worship: or, The Right Manner of Sanctifying the Name of God . . . (London: Peter Cole, 1648), p. 9.

[199] Ibid., p. 229.

[200] Ibid.

[201] Jeremiah Burroughes, A Vindication of Mr. Burroughes, Against Mr. Edwards his Foule Aspersions, in His Spreading Gangraena, and His Angry Antiapologia . . . (London: Printed for H. Overton, 1646), p. 12.

we have from his pen in the years of controversy bears out the impression gained from his work in the Assembly that his opinions did not deviate at this time from those of his colleagues. There is, for instance, the statement in a joint letter of Stephen Marshall and Philip Nye from Scotland to their associates in the Assembly to the effect that the Scottish brethren could be counted on "to live and die with us in this quarrel against the Popish and Episcopall Faction, and for the Reformation of Religion according to the word."[202]

Further, there is Nye's speech in the Assembly upon the presentation there of the Solemn League and Covenant with the Scots. The main point, he says, is opposition to "Popery and prelacie." "Prelacie," he claims, has been "a subtile combination of Clergymen formed into a policy or body of their own invention, framing themselves into Subordination and Dependencie one upon another, . . . and a great power by this meanes acquired to themselves."[203] And also, in a more specifically Independent vein agreeing exactly with the opinion we have just seen expressed by Jeremiah Burroughes, there is this statement from Nye's tract Beames of Former

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[202] A Letter from Mr. Marshall, and Mr. Nye, appointed Assistants to the Commissioners of Scotland: To Their Brethren in England, Concerning the Successe of Their Affaires There, Parly Concerning the Covenant . . . (London: Printed for John Bellamy and Ralph Smith, 1643), n. p.

[203] The Covenant: With a Narrative of the Proceedings and Solemn Manner of Taking it by the Honourable House of Commons and Reverent Assembly of Divines. . . . Also, Two Speeches Delivered at the Same Time; The One by Mr. Philip Nye . . . (London: Printed for Thomas Underhill, 1643), pp. 17-19.

Light . . . : "Rites and Forms that have a Stated Use, and to Spiritual ends, in the Worship of God, ought to have a Scripture warrant for their establishment."[204]

Nye's major writings were composed in the Restoration era, face-to-face with a radically altered set of problems. He was no longer dealing with the circumstances of the confrontation with the Anglicans and Presbyterians in the 1640's, or of the era of Independent freedom of the 1650's. With the return of Charles II, the Great Ejection of 1662, and the repressive measures of the so-called "Clarendon Code," nonconformity of all brands (including the Presbyterian, whose adherents hoped until the last minute for such accommodation to their scruples as would include them in the reconstituted state Church) suffered major disabilities, even in many cases intense and bitter persecution.[205] The Puritan nonconformists' choice in these hard days was between utter intransigence in

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[204]Beames of Former Light, Discovering How Evil It Is To Impose Doubtful and Disputable Formes or Practices, Upon Ministers: Especially Under the Penalty of Ejection for Non-conformity Unto the Same . . . (London: Printed by R. I. for Adoniram Byfield, 1660), p. 16.

[205]It would be out of place and unnecessary to go into details here. The basic facts of history are well-known and included in any survey work on the period. Good coverage of the fortunes of the nonconformists in the period is given in these two books:

Harry Grant Plum, Restoration Puritanism: A Study of the Growth of English Liberty (Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1943).

G. R. Cragg, Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution: 1660-1688 (Cambridge: The University Press, 1957).

behalf of the purity of his convictions, which often resulted in great suffering for himself and his family and friends (seventeenth-century prisons were, for instance, generally horrible places), and such accommodation to the newly-established order as would result in some degree of personal relief from persecution, and allow the nonconformist to lead some semblance of a normal life in the existing society. Nye favored the latter course. His writings in this regard were published posthumously.

I shall deal first with The Lawfulness of Hearing the Publick Ministers of the Church of England, Proved. . . .[206] This was, so the subtitle of the posthumous edition tells us, "published as well to satisfy those that yet scruple Communion with the Church, as to vindicate those that have complied, from the uncharitable Censures of those that vilify them, as Temporizers; or that they have done so to qualify themselves for an Office, to serve a Turn, or to save themselves from the Penal Laws."[207] Herein Nye has worked out a theological justification for "occasional conformity" which bears directly upon his theory of the church. This question is posed: "Whether we may lawfully hear the Now Conforming Ministers, who are Re-ordained, and have renounced the Covenant, and some of them supposed to be scandalous in their Lives?"[208]

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[206](London: Printed for Jonathan Robinson, 1683).

[207]Ibid., title page. [208]Ibid., p. 1.

And to this he answers that hearing the word is a gospel duty. God conveys knowledge of himself through nature, through works of creation and providence. To these we should attend. How much more, then, is it "an undoubted moral Duty, to attend the speaking of God, in whatsoever way by Providence brought unto us."[209]

Preaching, the interpretation and application of Scripture, is a "National Gift," according to Psalm 147:19-20. Therefore, "such National or Publick Preachers, may be said to have their Call from Christ, he having a hand in ordering the Motions of Providence for the Good of his Church, John 5:17."[210] Further:

> The Word of God interpreted and apply'd by preaching in this providential way, is a choice Mercy and Gift, wherewith God hath blessed this Nation for many Years, to the Conversion and Edification of many thousands. The Governors thereof have successively, according to their Light, made divers good Laws and Statutes for improving this Mercy for the best advantage of the Nation, as appears in that,
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> . . . . . .
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> 2. There is a sum of Doctrinal Truths, which in the Enlargement and Application, are sufficient both for Conversion and Edification, to which the Preachers are to assent; and there is a provision made by our Laws, that such Persons only who are sound in the Faith be imployed therein.
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> 3. These things being so, although some of us do enjoy the Instruction of our Pastors being in a Church-Relation, yet it is a Duty that we and our Families frequent also (as we have Liberty and Opportunity) the more Publick and National Ministry. . . .[211]

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[209] Ibid.

[210] Ibid., pp. 1-2.

[211] Ibid., p. 2.

There is, then, the National Church, and there are gospel churches. These are not exclusive of each other, but complementary, says Nye. In the National Church there is preaching aimed at conversion. And in gospel or Congregational churches, the saints are organized into church-state in order to build the Christian life on the basis of this initial conversion.[212] It is a neat job of accommodation in a very difficult situation, only to be scorned by those whose loyalty to ideal states of things is utterly unbending. The Independents had always denied that the Church of England had lost all claim to the title of a Christian church. And in this compromise they were not much less free to maintain the basic fundamentals of Congregationalism than they had thought they would be in the early 1640's if the Presbyterian party had remained in the ascendant. One must surely have sympathy for Nye in the searching of conscience which must have gone into this reconstruction of his theory of the church after the Independents' hopes and dreams had suffered such a crushing reversal.

In The Lawfulness of the Oath of Supremacy . . .[213] Nye makes the same sort of distinction between the state church which "was the organization of the nation in relation to God, and was God's gift to man in his natural condition," and the

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[212] Ibid., pp. 2-3.

[213] (London: Printed for John Robinson, 1683).

gospel or Congregational voluntary churches, which are "Christ's legacy to man in a state of grace."[214] Again the two are seen to be complementary. The state should tolerate various churches, and the different churches should tolerate each other, and the state Church. Also, "any exclusive claim to be the only true church of Christ must be abandoned."[215] God's purposes operate beyond the narrow sphere of gospel churches.[216] Indeed, the National Church is a "merciful dispensation" of God whereby the nation may "lead a religious life" and perform a "corporate worship of God."[217]

It is difficult to say that all of this constitutes a reversal of Nye's and the Dissenting Brethren's earlier positions on the church, for, as we have seen, unlike their Separatist predecessors, the classical Independents in both the 1640's and 1650's evidenced a clear concern for the national religious life and the disposition of the remaining institutional structures of the state church. Concern with these matters was not in the forefront of their thinking in those years, however. Rather, in the 1640's they were fighting for the recognition of the rights and the scriptural correctness of Congregationalism, and in the 1650's seeking in their newfound freedom to perfect this system as they had espoused it.

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[214] D. Nobbs, "Philip Nye on Church and State," The Cambridge Historical Journal, V (1935), 57.

[215] Ibid.

[216] Ibid., p. 58.

[217] Ibid.

In the quite altered circumstances of the Restoration period, though, new occasions taught Nye the relative importance of other concerns, uppermost among them being the extent to which a reconstituted and vigorous Anglican Church might be not only endured, but appreciated for its value to the national life, and cooperated with to the advantage of the Congregational way.

E. Sidrach Simpson on the Church

Sidrach Simpson wrote relatively little on the church compared to the other Dissenting Brethren. What we have from him is in substantial agreement with the points made by his colleagues. There is, for instance, the usual blanket condemnation of the "Papists" for the "power of Priests and Sacrifices."[218] And there is a strikingly high view of the visible church (that is, the particular congregation), wherein he says: "Consider there is a double incarnation of Christ as I may call it, one proper in the flesh of his person, another mysticall in the flesh of his Saints, and therefore they are called Christ, I Cor. 12:12."[219]

Further, there is the same claim as that made by Jeremiah Burroughes that the Congregational system is actually as effective for gospel purposes in matters of censure or discipline as

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[218] A Sermon Preached at Westminster Before Sundry of the House of Commons (London: Printed for Peter Cole, 1643), p. 29.

[219] Reformation's Preservation: Opened in a Sermon Preached . . . Before the Honourable House of Commons . . . July 26, 1643 (London: Printed for Benjamin Allen, 1643), p. 12.

the more juridically-oriented Presbyterian system, if indeed it is not really more effective. Simpson puts the matter this way:

> What flaming sword is there in the hands of a Classical Presbytery to keepe men out of errours which may not be in a Congregation? In one Congregation there may be as many Presbiters as from many Congregations make a Classis; and why then may they not doe the selfe same acts? their Officers and Office is the same. And if the Counsell and advice of other neighbour Churches be required, a congregation may have that as well, and perhaps sooner that a Classis can, which must stay for a Provincial Synod.
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> There have been as great defections both of Ministers and people unto errours, under Presbiteriall government as under any other.[220]

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220 The Anatomist Anatomis'd. Or, A Short Answer to Some Things in the Book Intituled, An Anatomy of Independencie . . . (London: Printed for Peter Cole, 1644), p. 10.

CHAPTER VIII

THE POSITION OF THE DISSENTING BRETHREN ON THE CHURCH JOINTLY STATED

A. An Apologeticall Narration

The greatest impact upon the public which the Dissenting Brethren enjoyed was realized, certainly, as a result of the influence of those writings which they published as a group. Of these An Apologeticall Narration Humbly Submitted to the Honourable Houses of Parliament is, without doubt, the best known. It is not, however, the item which most clearly spells out in detail their mature thoughts on the nature of the church and on polity resulting from that theory. Rather, for the most part, it sets forth their thoughts gleaned on these subjects as a result of their stay in Holland, and relates considerable details of the controversies and adjustments connected with that stay. The Reasons of the Dissenting Brethren delineates more clearly than An Apologeticall Narration their Congregational position vis-à-vis the Presbyterian-leaning and Scotch-influenced majority opposition in the Assembly. With this we shall deal presently.

The five Dissenting Brethren begin An Apologeticall Narration by stating that because of the outcry raised against

their position in the Assembly they were "enforced to anticipate a little that discovery of our selves which otherwise we resolved to have left to Time and Experience of our wayes and spirits, the truest Discoverers and surest Judges of all men and their actions."[1] The "dark cloud of manifold mis apprehensions" which surrounds them leads them to appeal to "the Supreame Judicatory of this Kingdome," which is "the most sacred refuge and Asylum for mistaken and mis-judged innocence."[2]

A word of self-justification follows. The Dissenting Brethren point out that they were disturbed by conditions in the Church of England long before some others who now professed to be, and accepted the discomfiture of exile as a result.[3] At first they saw only the "dark part" of the problem, "the evill of those superstitions adjoyned to the worship of God, which have been the common stumbling block and offence of many thousand tender consciences . . . ever since the first Reformation of Religion."[4] That is, in common with other Puritans from Edward VI's time to their own they were disturbed by the continuation of certain "popish" ceremonies and customs in the Reformed Church of England. The problem intensified for

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[1]Thomas Goodwin, et al., An Apologeticall Narration, p. 1 (reproduced in Haller, Tracts on Liberty, Vol. II, p. 309).

[2]Ibid., pp. 1-2 (Haller, pp. 309-10).

[3]Ibid., p. 2 (Haller, p. 310). [4]Ibid.

them when the offensive ceremonies not only continued but increased under Archbishop Laud, and they were pressured to conform, and deprived if they did not, choosing exile rather than violation of conscience.

Finding themselves cast adrift, then, they conceived "a farther necessity of enquiring into and viewing the light part, the positive part of Church-worship and Government."[5] They turned to the New Testament and the Apostolic Church for a pattern to follow, guided by no party pressures, but conscience only.[6] There were examples, which they consulted reverently. Such, they say, were the Reformed Churches. These, however, as in the case of the first leaders of the Reformed English Church, had much to do by way of basic Reformation, and it might easily be suspected that "they might not see into all things about worship and government."[7]

A second example was the light thrown upon Reformed churchmanship by the earlier English Puritan Reformers (called here "the good old Nonconformists"), men who had opposed the establishment in varying degrees under Mary and Elizabeth, and had in some cases also suffered exile.[8] A further example,

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[5]Ibid., p. 3 (Haller, p. 311).

[6]Ibid., pp. 3-4 (Haller, pp. 311-12).

[7]Ibid., p. 4 (Haller, p. 312).

[8]Ibid. An extremely good account of these under Elizabeth has been produced recently by Patrick Collinson, under the title The Elizabethan Puritan Movement (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967).

yet perhaps more of a warning, was seen in the work of adherents of "the Separation" ("Brownists"). Their difficulties were to be studied and avoided.[9] And lastly, there was the example of those who had gone to the New England wilderness "meerly to worship God more purely."[10]

In considering examples upon which to build a more truly scriptural form of the church in exile, the Dissenting Brethren never doubted, they say, as their Separatist forebears doubted, that "multitudes of the assemblies and parochiall congregations" of the Church of England "were the true Churches and Body of Christ, and the Ministery thereof a true Ministery."[11] As proof of this point it is avowed that they received some into communion who came to them in exile from Church of England parishes, upon hearing their affirmation of that membership, and knowing them to be "godly."

This is manifestly ambiguous, and the Presbyterian opponents of the Dissenting Brethren lost no time in pointing this out and attempting to tag them with the Separatist label. Alexander Forbes, for instance, in his An Anatomy of Independency . . . , had this to say:

See also M. M. Knappen, Tudor Puritanism (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), William Haller, The Rise of the Puritan Movement (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1957; first pub. 1938), Christina Garrett, The Marian Exiles (Cambridge: The University Press, 1938), and H. C. Porter, Reformation and Reaction in Tudor Cambridge (Cambridge: The University Press, 1958).

[9] Ibid., p. 5 (Haller, p. 313).

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., p. 6 (Haller, p. 314).

> It is plaine, they acknowledge onely Multitudes, of, not all the Churches of England true Churches, and the Ministrie of these Multitudes, not all, a true Ministrie. Me thinkes, Candor and ingenuitie, would here have required a plaine and free Declaration, what sort of Congregations and Ministrie they approve, and what sort they approve not, and upon what grounds. . . .[12]

What the Dissenting Brethren are saying, Forbes continues, is that some parishes of the Church of England have good men in them, visible saints, and by virtue of these men's presence the parishes are accounted true churches, even though there is a mixture of good and evil there. So they are "still telling us with the Brownists, that a church must consist of true Saints, alledging that place I John 2:19."[13] On coming to Arnhem (one of the places of the Dissenting Brethren's Holland exile) a person must affirm that he comes from such a congregation before he will be allowed to receive communion.[14]

Also, the very bitter Thomas Edwards caustically points out what, in his opinion, the Dissenting Brethren are really saying:

> I must . . . of necessity English your words, and tell you the meaning of all this: That is, neither the Church or Churches of England, nor the Ministery thereof, as they are in their frame and constitution, according to the Lawes; and as they are in their visible order, are true Churches or true Ministrie: But now, so farre, as in many of our Parochiall Congregations, there is something common with what you hold about a Church and Ministrie: so farre true, and not Anti-christian. As for

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[12] [Alexander Forbes] An Anatomy of Independency, or, A Brief Commentary, and Moderate Discourse upon The Apologeticall Narration of Mr. Thomas Goodwin, and Mr. Philip Nye, &c. . . . (London: Printed for Robert Bostock, 1644), p. 19.

[13] Ibid., p. 21.

[14] Ibid.

> example, you hold, that in some Congregations we have many visible Saints, and in some Parishes, Ministers chosen by the people, which Ministers preach and pray according to your way; but for what we else practise in our making of Ministers, in our formes of prescribed prayers, &c. So no true Churches nor Ministerie.[15]

Further, Adam Steuart, in his tract entitled Some Observations and Annotations upon the Apologeticall Narration, calls attention to what he considers the Dissenting Brethren's inconsistency:

> Ye call other Churches, your Neighbour Churches; if so, they are your sister Churches; And then how is it, That ye will not admit all the Members of their Churches, unto your Communion at the Table of the Lord? how can ye hold them for Brethren, with whom ye dare not eat or drink, at that spirituall Feast of Brotherly Love and Charity?[16]

Forbes, Edwards, and Steuart are right in their contention that the Dissenting Brethren here refrain from complete endorsement of the valid churchmanship of the Church of England in all its forms and practices. But the corollary attempt to identify them completely with the Separatists is hardly convincing. For such an identification, if correct, would need to be extended to the Presbyterian movement as well, since Presbyterians from Cartwright and Travers to the opponents of the Dissenting Brethren had in their writings and practices held similar qualifying positions with regard to the Church of England as by law established.[17] If the Dissenting Brethren in Holland exile went at

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[15]Edwards, Antapologia, pp. 47-48.

[16]p. 7.

[17]Again, Collinson's book on Elizabethan Puritanism shows this clearly. See particularly Parts 4 and 7.

all beyond the general Puritan position on the overall validity of the Church of England, it was only in exercising in the freedom which their situation allowed that discrimination which Presbyterian-leaning Puritans had for decades bemoaned their lack of freedom to exercise. And even here they claim to have practiced the use of the widest latitude in deciding who should be admitted to communion and fellowship. They avow that they received "the meanest, in whom there may be supposed to be the least of Christ," taking care not to reject anyone because his opinions differed from theirs.[18]

Returning, now, to our survey of An Apologeticall Narration, we find that in further justification of the rightness of their position the Dissenting Brethren claim that they were acknowledged as orthodox by the Reformed churches of Holland. Such churches let them use their buildings for worship, and ring the church bell (a privilege denied the sects).[19] The Dutch also provided them financial support for their ministers, and wine for their communions. These things were arranged for them by the Dutch magistrates.[20]

As for their practice, say the Dissenting Brethren, they followed the standard Reformed church pattern of worship, and maintained standard Reformed church officers (Pastors, Teachers,

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[18] An Apologeticall Narration, p. 12 (Haller, p. 320).

[19] Ibid., p. 7 (Haller, p. 315).

[20] Ibid., p. 8 (Haller, p. 316).

Ruling Elders ("with us not lay but Ecclesiastique persons separated to that service"),[21] and Deacons).[22] Furthermore, church censure was understood to involve admonition and excommunication, as with other Reformed churches. They did not actually excommunicate anyone while in Holland.[23]

The primary pattern which they followed in Holland, say the Dissenting Brethren, was the apostolic one found in the New Testament. Here there is sufficient guidance for the full erection of the church, and "rules and ruled cases for all occasions whatsoever, if we were able to discern them."[24] And where such guidance was not immediately evident judgment was suspended until more light became available out of the word, lest human error interpose itself.[25] Also, flexibility and

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[21]This was the case, they are saying, in the case of their exiled churches in Holland. It was not understood by them to constitute the normal pattern in ideal situations, however. Rather, it was a case of practical necessity in Holland, and they are in effect apologizing for this deviation from the ideal. There was not, in any case, the same sharp distinction between clergy and laity with the Independents that the Presbyterians maintained. The distinction was more between the congregation and its officers, the Elders and Deacons. Some of these Elders (Pastors and Teachers) were technically clergy, but their common function of pastoral rule which they shared with the Ruling Elders was a more important point than the clergy-laity difference between the two types of Elders. So when the distinction is made in their writing between their way of creating Elders and the Presbyterian way, it must be understood that they mean all of the Congregational Elders, but just those Elders considered to be clergy in the Presbyterian case. (See below, pp. 218-19, 233-34.)

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid., pp. 8-9 (Haller, pp. 316-17).

[24]Ibid., pp. 9-10 (Haller, pp. 317-18).

[25]Ibid., p. 10 (Haller, p. 318).

openness to future changes in practice were the rule, since human frailty could so easily lead to temporary misunderstandings of the word's import in particular circumstances.[26]

As for their major deviation from accepted Reformed church polity, that is, their unwillingness to refer matters of dispute to the presumed legal power of a presbytery, partial support for their position may be gained from a perusal of the stances of some of the older Presbyterians themselves, they claim. For instance, they say, it is the case that

> our own Master Cartwright, holy Baynes, and other old Non-conformists, place the power of Excommunication in the Eldership of each particular Church with the consent of the Church, untill they do miscarry, and then indeed they subject them to such Presbyterial and Provincial Assemblies as the proper refuge for appeales and for compounding of differences amongst Churches; which combination of Churches others of them therefore call Ecclesiae ortae, but particular congregations Ecclesiae primae, as wherein firstly the power and priviledg of a Church is to be exercised.[27]

Next, the Dissenting Brethren claim that the first churches set up in various cities by the Apostles were single congregations, ruled by their own Elders, who were their

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[26]Ibid., pp. 10-11 (Haller, pp. 318-19).

[27]Ibid., p. 13 (Haller, p. 321). Ecclesiae primae (primary churches); Ecclesiae ortae (derived churches), see Paul, An Apologeticall Narration, p. 39. Paul, in the same work, makes this important point: "It should be recognized that the Dissenting Brethren were pressing for the recognition of the congregational presbytery, and not the sole power of the local congregation. Over against the pastoral power of its presbyters the covenanted members of a local congregation had the right of consent, and it was only later that a 'democratic' ecclesiology began to develop." (p. 38) "Holy Baynes" is Paul Baynes (?-1617), "lecturer at St. Andrews Church, Cambridge, on the death of William Perkins," and later forced into nonconformity. (Paul, p. 39)

preachers. This is an important point for them, which we have already noted in the individual writings of Thomas Goodwin.[28] In fact, there are two major points here: (1) the assertion that the Apostles set up Congregational churches; and (2) the affirmation that those who preached, who had the responsibility for pastoral care, were also those to whom jurisdiction or rule was given, rather than to Elders beyond and not directly responsible for the members of the local congregation.

The biblical precepts "obey your Elders, and them that are over you" were, say the Dissenting Brethren, "meant of the Pastours and Teachers, and other Elders that were set over them in each particular congregation respectively, and . . . certainly the intendment of the holy Ghost."[29] This biblical pattern, then, set forth by the Apostles and intended by the Holy Ghost, was precisely what they followed in their exile churches in Holland, reserving disciplinary matters for decision within the congregation by its own Elders (of which there were at least three in a congregation).[30] This, they say, involved not an "independent power," but "onely a ful and entire power compleat within ourselves, until we should be challenged to err grossly."[31]

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[28]Above, pp. 133-35.

[29]An Apologeticall Narration, p. 14 (Haller, p. 322).

[30]Ibid.

[31]Ibid.

Here also are crucial points which we have noted in the Dissenting Brethren's personal writings.[32] The power is not "independent" in the sense of not responsible to the best judgment of those in sister churches with whom they hope to remain in peace, communion, and fellowship. The power to rule over Christ's flock, to judge in matters of discipline, even to excommunicate, is completely and fully resident in the particular congregation, however; and such a congregation ordinarily carries out its business without appeal beyond its bounds, except in cases where it is noted outside those bounds that a grave injustice or serious misjudgment has been perpetrated. When such is the case, sister churches have the obligation to attempt to recall the erring congregation to a righteous path.

The Presbyterian system, however, holds it to be "the institution of Christ or his Apostles, that the combination of the Elders of many Churches should be the first compleat and entire seat of Church power over each congregation . . . combined" in a presbytery. This, the Dissenting Brethren assert, is an "additament" to the apostolic practice; and it is the obligation of those who hold it to prove it from Scripture.[33] They will get little help from the "old Non-conformists," since their time was spent primarily in devising arguments

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[32]Above, pp. 20-22, 101, 130-31, 137-40, 167-68.

[33]An Apologeticall Narration, pp. 14-15 (Haller, pp. 322-23).

for "overthrowing the Episcopall government, and the corruptions that cleave to our worship, and in maintayning those severall Officers in Churches which Christ hath instituted in stead thereof."[34] With all this to do they had scant time for constructing "proofe of a combined classical Presbyteriall government as it is authoritatively practised in the most reformed Churches."[35]

Since a major objection against the Congregational way is that there is insufficient provision for redress of grievances, even of the most pressing kind, it is necessary to refute this once and for all, the Dissenting Brethren continue. And an example of the corrective process of Congregationalism at work is ready to hand from the Holland exile. This is the dissention between Bridge and Simpson and their followers which I have noted earlier,[36] spoken of more piously by the Dissenting Brethren themselves in these terms: "God so ordered it that a scandall and offence fell out between those very Churches whilst living in this banishment (whereof we our selves, that write these things, were then the ministers)."[37]

In this case the judgment of sister churches was requested, was received as being from Christ, and served to heal the differences.[38] What more could have been rationally

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[34] Ibid. [35] Ibid.

[36] Above, pp. 77-79.

[37] An Apologeticall Narration, p. 16 (Haller, p. 324).

[38] Ibid., pp. 16, 20-22.

or scripturally done (other than appeal to the magistrate, which is again here acknowledged as proper in hard cases[39]) the Dissenting Brethren say they did not see then and still do not. For the shunning or withdrawing from communion of sister churches they see as an effective means of bringing an erring congregation to a conviction of its guilt, as effective as any legalistic presbyterial excommunication. This is so to them because legal excommunication by a presbytery has only one more point of spiritual persuasion in it than the Congregational way, "that is a delivering of whole Churches and their Elders offending unto Satan."[40] But "unlesse it doe take hold of mens consciences, and be received amongst all Churches, the offending Churches will sleight all such Excommunications as much, as they may be supposed to doe our way of protestation and sentence of Non-communion."[41] We have previously heard exactly these arguments from the pen of Jeremiah Burroughes.[42]

In the course of this part of the discussion the

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[39]See above, pp. 60-61, 111-12, 140-41, 166-67.

[40]An Apologeticall Narration, p. 18 (Haller, p. 326). Edwards in Antapologia denies that this was the current Presbyterian practice (p. 151, noted in Paul, An Apologeticall Narration, p. 40). The same complaint--in this case that such had not been the practice in the Church of Scotland for eighty years--was made in the pamphlet entitled A Coole Conference Between the Scottish Commissioners Cleared Reformation, and the Holland Ministers Apologeticall Narration, Brought Together by a Well-willer to Both (1644), p. 14.

[41]Ibid., pp. 18-19 (Haller, pp. 326-27).

[42]Above, pp. 168-69.

Dissenting Brethren set forth in embryonic form their understanding of the place and importance of a Synod in Congregational practice, although they do not here use the word "Synod." The formulation reads as follows:

> In this case our Churches did mutually and universally acknowledge and submit to this as a sacred and undoubted principle and supreame law to be observed among all Churches, that as by virtue of that Apostolical command, Churches as wel as particular men are bound to give no offence neither to Iew nor Gentile, nor the Churches of God they live amongst. So that in all cases of such offence or difference, by the obligation of comon law of comunion of Churches, & for the vindication of the glory of Christ, which in comon they hold forth, the church or churches chalenged to offend or differ, are to submit themselves (upon the challenge of the offence or complaint of the person wronged) to the most full & open tryall & examination by other neighbour Churches offended thereat, of what ever hath given the offence: And further, that by the virtue of the same and like law of not partaking in other mens sins, the Churches offended may & ought upon the impenitency of those Churches, persisting in their errour and miscarriage to pronounce that heavy sentence, against them, of withdrawing and renouncing all Christian communion with them until they do repent; And further to declare and protest this, with the causes thereof, to all other Churches of Christ, that they may do the like.[43]

The Congregational way of thus proceeding is called by the Dissenting Brethren "more brotherly and more suited to that liberty and equality Christ hath endowed his Churches with."[44] We have seen Thomas Goodwin making this claim, that the Congregational way is in fact closer to the mind of Christ because more love-oriented than the Presbyterian way.[45] And

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[43] An Apologeticall Narration, pp. 16-17 (Haller, pp. 324-25).

[44] Ibid., p. 19 (Haller, p. 327).

[45] Above, p. 144.

Robert Paul makes this one of the main thrusts of his commentary upon An Apologeticall Narration. In his concluding chapter, entitled "The Basic Issue: 'And what further authority,'" he states this:

> /The seventeenth-century Independents/ were feeling their way for a truth that perhaps they saw only dimly, but which they had nevertheless begun to see. They agreed that the Church's authority had been given it by Christ, and they agreed that to oppose it was sin, but their departure was in the tacit assertion that this authority which comes from Christ could be His authority only as it was exercised in His spirit, ministerially, according to His mind. This was the reason for insisting that spiritual jurisdiction could be performed within the context of the Church's life of worship and pastoral care, and this was the reason for insisting that the only censures that were appropriate to the Church were spiritual: the Church could not invoke the use of force without denying the very authority she claimed, and the Church could not exercise spiritual jurisdiction except as an expression of its ministry, and in fulfillment of the same.[46]

Paul goes on to say that this insight, when applied, is an important contribution out of the Congregational movement to the ecumenical discussion of today.[47] The point Paul makes about authority being exercised as a constituent part of the pastoral ministry of the congregation's officers is important. The officers are thus carrying out crucial obligations of the church-covenant relationship. And this is part of what sets apart the Independent brand of churchmanship from other types. One would perhaps have cause to wonder, however, whether the corollary assertion that in effect the Congregationalists were

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[46]Paul, An Apologeticall Narration, pp. 124-25.

[47]Ibid., p. 125.

coming closer to understanding the mind of Christ in the seventeenth century than their Roman Catholic, Anglican, or Presbyterian opponents is not more of a hindrance than a help to ecumenical endeavors.[48] It strikes this reader as involving something of the same sort of denominational self-assertiveness--albeit highly qualified in Paul's case--as is surely involved in the bibliography of the writings of eminent Congregationalists contained in Albert Peel's Essays Congregational and Catholic, which begins with the New Testament and the writings of the Apostolic Fathers (stressing, of all people, Ignatius!).[49]

The Independent leaders of the seventeenth century are certainly not without their budding denominational pride, as is shown by this assertion, made repeatedly in their writings, that they have laid hold on the mind of Christ more truly than those who oppose them. And Paul seems to try to deal with this by making a virtue of it. He does admit in a general way that "they were struggling between the letter of the New Testament and the spirit of the New Testament,"[50] but he virtually ignores such strong evidence of the letter's strength in the struggle as is contained in the fact that Thomas Goodwin's thoughts on the power of the keys exercised in the congregation are no less legalistic than representative Presbyterian

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[48] Ibid.

[49] Albert Peel, ed., Essays Congregational and Catholic (London: Congregational Union of England and Wales, 1931), p. 359.

[50] Paul, An Apologeticall Narration, p. 124.

positions on the power of the keys exercised in judicatories beyond the local church.[51]

Nor does Paul seem to take very much into account the fact that the claim to have the mind of Christ was one of the least unusual of the claims made by the various brands of churchmanship current in the seventeenth century. The Presbyterians claimed this for their presbyteries, synods, and national assemblies; and the Anglicans for their bishops acting as fathers-in-God to their dioceses. And perhaps no one in the Reformation era was more convinced that he acted according to the mind of Christ than the sincere inquisitor torturing the heretic for the sake of his immortal soul!

Such, Paul and the Dissenting Brethren before him would probably say, is a perfect example of the misreading of Scripture, whereas the Congregational way had read it correctly. And it is hard in the light of present-day humanistic values to deny the substantial truth of this with regard to the inquisitor; but in the cases of the usual modes of church life of the Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and Presbyterians the verdict is not that clear. The writings of the Independents often reflect a legalism surely unsurpassed by the accomplishments of any of their opponents in these matters.[52] And passing from

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[51]See above, pp. 141-42.

[52]See below, pp. 217-24, for examples of highly legalistic biblical literalism in the Dissenting Brethren's Reasons.

empathetic reporting of the Dissenting Brethren's convictions about the rightness of their cause vis-à-vis Christ and the Scripture to virtual agreement that they were closer to the mark than their opponents, as, in my opinion, Robert Paul does, is a procedure not entirely helpful at this point.[53]

Furthermore, if one is to make the degree to which they spiritualized their churchmanship a criterion for the authenticity of their Christianity, as Paul seems to, the Quakers and other sectarians to the left of the Independents must be seen to have far outrun them in this regard in the seventeenth century. There seems to be a tendency on Paul's part--despite a specific disclaimer on the point--to take the professed ideal of the covenanted congregation of visible saints as a realized fact, while at the same time dealing with the Presbyterian system not as ideally formulated in the writings of its outstanding adherents, but as it imperfectly worked itself out amidst the vicissitudes of historical conditions.

Something of an alternative view of the genesis of the Dissenting Brethren's particular brand of churchmanship is taken by Berndt Gustafsson in The Five Dissenting Brethren: A Study on the Dutch Background of Their Independentism.[54] Here we find more of a sociology-of-religion approach. Rather

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[53] It is particularly not helpful as a professed contribution to the ecumenical movement.

[54] (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1955).

than emphasizing so much Scripture and the mind of Christ as definitive factors in the formation of their churchmanship, Gustafsson sees ideas and practices developed under the conditions experienced in the Holland of their exile as particularly important. Their experiences of church authority-structures in Holland determined to a large degree their developing conception of the biblical pattern of the church. He says:

> They were--except Goodwin--not Independents, when they went to Holland, but they were non-conformists according to the new episcopal system. As far as we have historical documents, the rise of their independentism must be located to their stay in Holland. They came there as opponents against the novelties of Wren and Laud and against the new episcopal authority, and they came back as full Independents.[55]

As foreigners in Holland the Dissenting Brethren maintained for themselves and their churches a cordial relationship to the Dutch Reformed church authorities, as we have noted them stating in An Apologeticall Narration. Help was given in various ways by those responsible for civil order, as we have noted also. But at the same time, the Dutch state-church authorities did not attempt to exercise the same kind of jurisdiction over the English exile churches as they did over their own churches. Thus developed the pattern of "a far-reaching self-government" without "any real inspection from the side of the higher church authorities," coupled with "a certain dependence on the civil authorities."[56]

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[55] Ibid., p. 19.

[56] Ibid., p. 44.

And "it was just this pattern of authority that the brethren urged in the Westminster Assembly."[57]

Thus far it is not very difficult to see the cogency of this argument.[58]

Such statements as these are, however, clearly wrong: "The brethren had no interest in the theology of church offices. Their point of view was simple and practical. All that was wanted was charity and brotherhood within the congregation."[59] And: "Within the church they saw the ideal in a congregational life without any authority structure and the same was to them the ideal for the relationships between the local churches."[60] As I have shown, Goodwin in particular wrote extensively about the theology of church offices.[61] And an unstructured relationship between members of a congregation, or between congregations, was far from being the position of classical Independency as represented by the Dissenting Brethren.[62]

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[57] Ibid.

[58] Berndt Gustafsson goes on from here to a detailed discussion of the presumed democratic leanings of Remonstrantism or Arminianism in the Holland of that era as important background to the Independents' developing self-understanding. In my opinion Gustafsson succeeds in proving no more than the parallel existences of Remonstrantism and English Independentism in the Holland of the time.

[59] Ibid., p. 13. [60] Ibid., p. 14.

[61] Above, pp. 130, 145, 148-49, 150-54.

[62] See n. 77, pp. 209-11 for a discussion of the "Barrowist" authority-structures of the Dissenting Brethren's Independentism.

Returning again now to our survey of An Apologeticall Narration, we find the Dissenting Brethren claiming that the truth of church government should "lye and consist in a middle way betwixt that which is falsely charged on us, Brownisme; and that which is the contention of these times, the authoritative Presbyteriall Government in all the subordinations and proceedings of it."[63] About this claim Alexander Forbes has a strong complaint:

> Their main studie here is to cover, rather than to discover themselves, concealing most of all their differences from us, and delivering some onely in general termes (as that the truth of Church Discipline lieth in a middle way betwixt Brownisme and Presbyteriall Government, pag. 24. without telling us wherein their middle way doth consist.[64]

But this is fair only to the extent that it points up the fact that An Apologeticall Narration does not spell out their position in any great detail (a lengthier statement being probably ineffective for the propaganda purposes intended in this publication effort). What they say, for instance, about Synods and magistrates does not appear to be motivated by any particular desire to "cover" anything. It is simply a brief statement.

It is true that this was a point of contention between the Presbyterians and the Independents in the Assembly, the Presbyterian charge being that the Independents were reluctant

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[63] An Apologeticall Narration, p. 24 (Haller, p. 332).

[64] An Anatomy of Independency, p. 3.

to spell out their position for fear of losing some public support thereby. To this charge the Independents answered in 1645 in effect: "What's the use? The Assembly has tabled all our previous objections--on ordinations, Synods, etc.--and has already voted out and sent to Parliament a Presbyterian model of church government."[65] The Independents came in time to expect little from detailed representation of their position to the assembled Divines.

Such was not, however, at first the case. Early in the Assembly they did all they could to reach an accommodation, even joining a group of Presbyterians in publishing a conservative, anti-separatist statement entitled Certaine Considerations to Dis-swade Men from Further Gathering of Churches in This Present Juncture of Time.[66] And in An Apologeticall Narration they defend themselves vigorously against the charge of "schisme."[67] They have had, they say, since their return to England, "manifold advantages to make and encrease a partie," and have resisted them all,[68] although many provocations to self-defensive action have not been lacking.[69] They have

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[65] A Copy of a Remonstrance Lately Delivered in to the Assembly. by Thomas Goodwin, Ierem. Burroughs, William Greenhill, William Bridge, Philip Nye, Sidrach Simpson, and William Carter, Declaring the Grounds and Reasons of Their Declining to Bring in to the Assembly, Their Modell of Church-Government (London, 1645).

[66] (London: Printed for Ralph Smith, 1643).

[67] P. 23 (Haller, p. 331). [68] Ibid., p. 24 (Haller, p. 332).

[69] Ibid., p. 25 (Haller, p. 333). Winthrop Hudson makes this comment on the claims of self-abnegation here: "This account of their irenic behaviour is somewhat idealized, but it is true that a major portion of their attention was directed to the problem of healing the breaches and making real the unity they all had in Christ." ("Denominationalism ...," Church History, XXIV, 42).

continued to hope for "the peaceable and orderly Reformation of this Church and State," and a "happy latitude and agreement by means of this Assembly, and the wisdome of this Parliament" (that is, some sort of working agreement with the Presbyterians).[70] The Apologeticall Narration concludes with several pages of self-justifying comments in the spirit of an injured party hoping for vindication with the passage of time.[71]

B. The Preface to Cotton's Keyes

In 1644 Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye published a second edition of John Cotton's The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven, and Power Thereof, According to the Word of God, with an extended Preface by themselves amounting to a separate tract on church government.[72] As is the case with the Apologeticall Narration, this joint effort of two of the Dissenting Brethren is primarily concerned with matters of public controversy with the Presbyterian-leaning Puritans.

Goodwin and Nye's Preface to Cotton's Keyes begins by stating that in the "former darker times" popes, bishops, and councils had all the church power. When later the saints found their eyes opened by divine knowledge, they went too far

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[70] Ibid., p. 26 (Haller, p. 334).

[71] Ibid., pp. 27-31 (Haller, pp. 335-39).

[72] Ibid. The pages of the Preface are not numbered. Almost the entire Preface is in italics (a few words only are not). I am therefore omitting recognition of the italics here. The reference to the early, more democratic form of Congregationalism is, of course, to the "Brownists."

in the opposite (i.e., democratic) direction, and made high claims for the rights of the people of the congregation, in which "the Elders set over them did not exercise that power for them, which was properly theirs, and which Christ had (as they contended) radically and originally estated in the people only." But the truth lies somewhere in between these extremes.[73]

Christ would have his church ordered, say Goodwin and Nye, so that there is a "due and proportioned allotment and dispersion" of power within it. Power should not be vested in one man [the bishop], no matter how good a man he may be; nor should it be vested in officers "diversified into . . . many subordinations under one another" [as in the Presbyterian system]. Christ has been exact in setting forth the bounds of power in his church, if we are but able to discern them.[74]

This "grave and judicious Author in this his Treatise doth pursue to lay forth the just lines . . . of this division of Church power, . . . to the end to allay the contentions now on foot about it." He [Cotton] says that whatever power there is in the church comes directly from Christ. And this power resides in single congregations and in neighbor-churches. What kind of power resides in each it is Cotton's purpose to unfold.[75]

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[73] Ibid., n. p.

[74] Ibid., n. p.

[75] Ibid., n. p.

Goodwin and Nye's summary of Cotton's position on the power inherent in a single congregation follows. It is a particularly clear and forceful statement. I therefore reproduce it here in full:

> For the first. As hee supposeth each Congregation such, as to have the priviledge of injoying a Presbyterie, or companie of more or lesse Elders, proper unto it selfe; so being thus Presbyterated, he asserteth this incorporate body or societie to be the first and primary subject of a compleat and entire power within it selfe over its owne members; yea, and the sole native subject of all the power of Ordination and Excommunication, which is the highest Censure. And whereas this corporation consisteth both of Elders and Brethren (for as for women and children, there is a speciall exception by a Statute-law of Christ against their injoyment of any part of this publique power;) His scope is to demonstrate a distinct and severall share and interest of power, in matters of common concernment, vouchsafed in each of these, and dispersed among both, by Charter from the Lord: as in some of our Townes corporate, to a company of Aldermen, the Rulers, and a Common-Councell, a body of the people, there useth to be the like: He giving unto the Elders or Presbytery a binding power of Rule and Authoritie proper and peculiar unto them; and unto the Brethren, distinct and apart, an interest of power and priviledge to concurre with them, and that such affaires should not be transacted, but with the joynt agreement of both, though out of a different right: so that as a Church of Brethren only, could not proceed to any publique censures, without they have Elders over them, so nor in the Churchhave the Elders power to censure without the concurrence of the people; and likewise so, as each alone hath not power of Excommunicating the whole of either, though together they have power over any particular person or persons in each.[76]

So here we have stated together several of the by-now-familiar important points on the local particular congregation made by the Dissenting Brethren. There is a presbyterianism

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[76] Ibid., n. p.

involved, but the congregation is locally "presbyterated," rather than being imposed upon by a presbytery set above them. It is not a call for democracy in church government. The Ruling Elders really rule on the local scene. The congregation, basically, has the privilege of consenting. But the processes of ordination and censure, for instance, are not complete until this formal consent is obtained. The Elders and people together have complete power to do all which the church does, and to do it on the local level, without reference to higher judicatories. This mutual dependence of Elders and congregation, with the Elders assuming the leadership rights and responsibility, is what the historians of Congregationalism have traditionally called "Barrowism."[77]

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[77]Henry Martyn Dexter, in The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years, even goes so far as to distinguish high, broad, and low-church Barrowisms (or Johnsonism, Robinsonism, and Ainsworthism, p. 695). Such attempts to highly systematize a movement which was really not that systematic, particularly in its early phases, need not concern us very much here, however. The important point for our purposes here is that the Dissenting Brethren were in fact "Barrowist" in the traditional sense of the term. That is, they followed in the line of Barrowist Separatism in insisting that the true church cannot function "without the government and officers that /Christ/ hath assigned in his last will and testament unto it" /Four Causes of Separation, Carlson, ed., Barrow: 1587-1590, p. 65/. They emphasized the rule of the Elders, while Barrow tended to speak more of the "service" of the church by the Elders /A Breefe Sum of Our Profession, Carlson, ed., Barrow: 1587-90, p. 84; A Brief Summe of the Causes of Our Separation, Ibid., p. 119; Frederick J. Powicke, Henry Barrow: Separatist pp. 105-06/. This reflects, however, only a shade of difference in terminology. In neither case is church government conceived to be without authority-structures in the congregation.

One related point is of interest. R. Tudur Jones, in his Congregationalism in England: 1662-1962 draws a rather direct line from John Robinson (or Robinsonism, as Dexter puts

Next, a strong statement on Synods is made:

> And because these particular Congregations, both Elders and People, may disagree and miscarry, and abuse this power committed to them; He [Cotton] therefore, secondly, asserteth an association or communion of Churches, sending their Elders and Messengers into a Synod, (so he purposely chooseth to style those Assemblies of Elders which the Reformed Churches doe call Classes or Presbyteries, that so hee might distinguishe them from those Presbyteries of Congregations before mentioned.) And acknowledgeth that it is an Ordinance of Christ, unto whom Christ hath (in relation to rectifying Mal-administrations and healing dissentions in particular Congregations, and the like cases) committed a due and just measure of power, suited and proportioned to those ends; and furnished them, not onely with abilitie to give counsell and advice, but further upon such occasions with a Ministeriall power and authoritie to determine, declare and injoyn such things as may tend to the reducing such Congregations to right order and peace. . . . [The Synod, however, is] not armed with authoritie and power of Excommunicating or delivering unto Satan, either the Congregations or the Members of them.[78]

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it) to the signers of An Apologeticall Narration. He see Robinson's later-life "semi-separatism" as a point of transition between the earlier and harsher Separatism and the later classical Independency. He quotes Peter Heylyn's Cyprianus Anglicus (1668, p. 367) to the effect that the Dissenting Brethren "embraced Robinson's Moddel of Church Government," using this model while in exile (Jones, pp. 22-24). Jones, in turn, has taken this quotation from Geoffrey Nuttall's Visible Saints, and, in my opinion, has not taken enough of the context to make Nuttall's point clear. For Nuttall's primary contention at this juncture is not so much the recognition of Robinson as background for the Dissenting Brethren's views (he does affirm this, while also mentioning Bradshaw, Ames, and others), but the point that "in commending Cotton's Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven (1644) Goodwin and Nye, at least, show that they looked also to another leader, who, perhaps because (though invited to do so) he never returned from New England . . . , has hardly received from historians of English Nonconformity the attention which is his due." (Nuttall, pp. 14-15) Further, Nuttall and Hugh R. Dolphin, in an earlier article entitled "John Cotton's 'Keyes of the Kingdom' (1644)" (Congregational Historical Society Transactions, XIV (May, 1944), 205-12) state that for "the Dissenting Brethren's way" John Cotton and his Keyes "became definitive." (p. 205)

[78]T. Goodwin and P. Nye, Preface to Cotton's Keyes, n. p.

The formal act of censure, if one be deemed necessary, must be left up to the particular congregation. If the congregation refuses to mend its ways or censure its offenders, whatever the case may be, then neighboring churches should determine to withdraw communion from that congregation. The congregations, however, even though erring grievously, must remain free to exercise "the priviledge of intire Jurisdiction committed unto each Congregation (as a libertie purchased them by Christ's blood)."[79] The most a Synod may do is "onely to assist, guide, and direct them, and not take on them to administer for them, but with them, and by them."[80]

Having summarized what Cotton has to say about the relative powers of particular congregations and Synods of the Elders of neighboring churches, Goodwin and Nye embrace it as their own, with a few reservations. They say that it expresses "that very Middle-way (which in our Apologie we did in the generall intimate and intend) between that which is called Brownisme and the Presbyteriall-government, as it is practised."[81] Brownisme, they say, "doth in effect put the chiefe (if not the whole) of the rule and government into the hands of the people, and drowns the Elders votes (who are but a few) in the major part of theirs."[82] And Presbyterianism "doth . . . in like manner swallow up, not only the interests of the people, but

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[79] Ibid., n. p.

[80] Ibid., n. p.

[81] Ibid., n. p.

[82] Ibid., n. p.

even the votes of the Elders of that Congregation concerned" into the "Jurisdiction of a common Presbyterie of severall Congregations."[83]

While agreeing with Cotton, Goodwin and Nye next take some pains to point out that they have not copied him, but have long since held parallel opinions independently arrived at. They seem, perhaps, to protest too much here, especially in view of what we know of the early influence of Cotton upon Goodwin.[84] All that probably is involved here is a brief display of harmless and understandable personal pride in accomplishment on the part of the two Dissenting Brethren.

Next, Goodwin and Nye, having established their broad general agreement with Cotton, disagree on a few particulars. First, under strict conditions, they would allow "prophesying" (preaching) to be engaged in by men not officially Elders of the church. In this they conceive themselves to be somewhat more liberal than Cotton. Also, they record some disagreement on the interpretation of the Council of Jerusalem and an assembly of Elders at Antioch, the upshot of this apparently being that Goodwin and Nye consider themselves to be more

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[83] Ibid., n. p.

[84] See above, pp. 72-73. Also, Robert Baillie stated that Goodwin was brought into the Independent fold by Cotton's letters from New England, in A Dissuasive from the Errours of the Time . . . (London: Printed for Samuel Gellibrand, 1645), p. 56; and The Disswasive . . . Vindicated from the Exceptions of Mr. Cotton and Mr. Tombes (London: Printed by Evan Tyler for Samuel Gellibrand, 1655), p. 18.

wary of the power of Synods than Cotton (although at the same time they acknowledge him to be cautious). Further, Goodwin and Nye would distinguish more sharply than Cotton does between the implicit ("intrinsecall") power of the people in the congregation and the actual working authority of the Elders in the day-to-day dealings of that congregation. "Rule" and "obedience" are not, say Goodwin and Nye, just metaphors, but living realities in the church. Such rule is "not directing only, but binding."[85]

At the same time, Goodwin and Nye assert, the power of excommunication does not rest solely in the pastor, but in pastor and people acting together. Elders may not high-handedly deliver to Satan those who disagree with them or displease them. An analogy Goodwin and Nye see in the civil sentence of death, which may not be given by judges alone. There must be "the concurrence of a Jury of his Peers, which are of his own rank."[86]

All that Goodwin and Nye seem to be doing in any of these qualifying statements is recording a shade of difference, emphasizing where they believe Cotton did not, holding back a bit where they think Cotton went too far. It appears to me that Goodwin and Nye have represented Cotton accurately. For instance, Cotton is highly offended that in "some places" "private

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[85]T. Goodwin and P. Nye, Preface to Cotton's Keyes, n. p.

[86]Ibid., n. p.

Christians ordinarily take upon them to preach the Gospel publikely." Yet the difference is not extreme, for Cotton adds that the dividing line between those who may preach and administer sacraments is one of "Office" and not "Order."[87] And on Synods, he does appear to be stronger than the Dissenting Brethren. When there is "dissension and opposition" between parties in a congregation, "the Church ought not to proceed without consulting with the Synod."[88] Further, the Synod so called is not only to give "light and counsell in matters of Truth and Practice; but also to command and injoyn the things to be believed and done."[89] The shade of difference, however, is more in the forcefulness of the wording; for the most the Synod can do to enforce its commands is to withdraw communion from the offending church.[90] And churches contributing to the Synod may rebuke the actions of their representatives when they return home, if those actions are deemed to be not of Christ's sanction.[91] Also, when affairs are running normally in a congregation, the Elders perform all functions of rule without any reference to Synods for their authority.[92] The main point in Goodwin and Nye's qualifying statements seems to be to establish the fact that they

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[87]Cotton, Of the Keys, pp. 6-7.

[88]Ibid., p. 15. The underlining is mine.

[89]Ibid., p. 25.

[90]Ibid.

[91]Ibid., p. 26.

[92]Ibid., p. 37.

have not been slavish followers of Cotton, but creative theorists in their own right.

C. The Reasons of the Dissenting Brethren

I have related in a previous chapter the circumstances of the writing[93] of The Reasons of the Dissenting Brethren against the Third Proposition, concerning Presbyteriall Government. Humbly Presented.[94] Hanbury wrote that "the value of the 'Reasons' may be estimated by the labour bestowed with the design of subverting them, and by their being part and parcel of the bases on which the principles of Scriptural Independency are established."[95]

The so-called "Third Proposition, concerning Presbyterial Government, as it was voted in the Assembly, and sent up to both Houses of Parliament"[96] reads, in full, as follows:

> The Scripture doth hold forth, That many particular congregations may be under one presbyterial government:
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> This proposition is proved by instances:
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> I. Instance, Of the church of Jerusalem; which consisted of more congregations than one, and all those congregations were under one presbyterial government. This appeareth thus, i. The church of Jerusalem consisted of more congregations than one, as is manifest, 1. By the multitude of Believers,--mentioned in divers texts collated,--both before the dispersion of the believers there by means of the persecution mentioned in

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[93] Above, pp. 106, 108-109.

[94] (London: Printed by G. M. for Ralph Smith, 1645).

[95] Hanbury, Historical Memorials, Vol. II, p. 461.

[96] Ibid.

the Acts of the Apostles, ch. 8, in the beginning thereof; witness Acts 1:2; 2:41, 46, 47; 4:4; 5:14; and 6:1, 7: and also, after the dispersion; Acts 9:31; 12:24; and 21:20-22. By the many apostles and other preachers, in the church of Jerusalem. If there were but one congregation there, then each apostle preached but seldom; which will not consist with Acts 6:2-3. The diversity of languages amongst the believers mentioned both in the 2nd and 6th chapters of the Acts, doth argue more congregations than one in that church. ii. All those congregations were under one presbyteriall government: because, 1. They were one church; Acts 8:1, and 2:47, compared with 5:11, 12:5, and 15:4. 2. The elders of that church, are mentioned in Acts 12:30; 15:4, 6, 22; 21:17, 18. 3. The apostles did the ordinary acts of presbyters, as presbyters, in that church, which proveth a presbyterial church before the dispersion; Acts 6. 4. The several congregations in Jerusalem being one church, the elders of that church are mentioned as meeting together for acts of government, Acts 11:30; 15:4, 6, 22; 21:17, 18, and so forwards: which proves that these several congregations were under one presbyterial government. And, whether these congregations were fixed, or not fixed, in regard of officers or members; it is all one, as to the truth of the Proposition. Nor doth there appear any material difference betwixt the several congregations now, in the ordinary condition of the church, as to the points of fixedness in regard of officers or members. Therefore, the Scripture doth hold forth, That many congregations may be under one presbyterial government.

II. Instance: Of the Church of Ephesus. For, i. That there were more congregations than one, in the church of Ephesus; appears by Acts 20:31, where is mention of Paul's continuance at Ephesus in preaching for 'the space of three years'; and Acts 14:18-20, where the especial effect of 'the Word' is mentioned; and verses 10 and 17, where is a distinction of 'Jews and Greeks': and I Cor. 16:8, 9, where is a reason of Paul's stay at Ephesus 'until Pentecost'; and verse 19, where is mention of a particular church 'in the house' of Aquila and Priscilla then at Ephesus, as appeareth Acts 18:19, 24, 26. All which laid together do prove, That the multitude of believers did make more congregations than one, in the church of Ephesus. ii. That there were many elders over these many congregations as one flock; appeareth Acts 20:17, 25, 28, 30, 36. iii. That those many congregations were one church; and that they were under one presbyterial government; appeareth Rev. 2:1-6, joined with Acts 20:17, 28.[97]

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[97] Ibid.

There are, the Dissenting Brethren say, "incongruities" in the "third proposition concerning presbyteriall government." There is a difference, they point out, between an evangelist (whose office is no longer active) and a Pastor, in the New Testament understanding. The difference is in "extent of power." They explain thus: "To extend a Pastors power of ordinary ruling beyond the extent of his ordinary teaching, is against the order which Christ hath set."[98] For, "the extent of a Pastors ordinary ruling power, is but to that Flock as his whole Flock which he is able to feed."[99] There is no power of oversight given by Christ beyond the feeding capacity of a Pastor vis-à-vis his flock.[100] As for ruling elders, these are assistants to Pastors, and, by simple logic, if the Pastors' powers do not extend beyond the local churches or congregations, neither do those of their assistants.[101] It is a common argument against episcopal power that "they are inforced to obey him that speakes not the word to them, nor watches over their soules."[102] By the same token "Presbyteriall Officers" are not to be obeyed.[103]

The extent of ruling is no larger than that of teaching.

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[98] The Reasons, p. 4.

[99] Ibid. We have seen Goodwin saying this in his individual writing. See above, pp. 130-31.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Ibid., p. 5.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

Preaching and ruling are joined together in the Pastor's office, "yet his power of ruling flowes in him from, and is the adjunct of his power to preach, and to be sure it is not extendible further."[104] The Dissenting Brethren are not making here a careful distinction between Pastor and Teacher, but are using the terms interchangeably. That distinction is not the point at issue in this case.

All the keys are given the Pastor at once, claim the seven Dissenting Brethren--"the keyes of ruling with the keyes of knowledge."[105] The power of preaching is a power of "jurisdiction," to be exercised in conjunction with others, and the latter power follows from the former.[106] This held true even for the Apostles. That is, their commission was to preach in all churches, therefore they ruled in all as universal Pastors and rulers.[107]

The Presbyterian system, the seven Dissenting Brethren challenge, results in a disproportion between the offices of ruling and preaching Elders. For the Pastor as Pastor is limited to the care of his own flock, as is also the case with Deacons. But the ruling Elders (who may be Pastors acting in this capacity) rule over all the congregations in the presbytery. Thus the office of ruling Elder becomes superior to the

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[104] Ibid.

[105] Ibid., p. 6.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

office of teaching Elder.[108] And a Pastor may be forced to be a teaching Elder in one situation (his own congregation) and a ruling Elder only (an inferior officer) in another (the presbytery).[109] To the twentieth-century reader, this practice of wearing in effect two hats may not seem particularly shocking, and he may well wonder what all the trouble is about. But to the biblically-literal seventeenth-century Puritan Dissenting Brethren there was involved here a grave breach of scriptural warrant. Had not Christ set Pastors and Teachers above ruling Elders in the pattern which he had provided for his church? And was not this lifting of the status of the latter above that of the former, then, a disobeying of Christ's explicit command, which conscience could not allow?[110]

In this Presbyterian practice there is "disorder and confusion," the Dissenting Brethren continue, occasioned by the fact that a Pastor is forced to maintain a full relation to one church (his own) and half a relation to another (whatever church is being currently dealt with by the presbytery).[111] And the confusion does not stop here, for the practice makes "an incongrous disproportion between the Extent of the relation of those two Offices of Elders and Deacons unto a Church."[112] Why not, then, a common Deaconship as well as a common Eldership

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[108] Ibid., p. 6.

[109] Ibid., p. 7.

[110] See above, n. 21, p. 191.

[111] Ibid.

[112] Ibid.

in the churches, the Dissenting Brethren ask, in a tone of despairing cynicism.[113]

Yet another incongruity is pointed out. The New Testament requires that all Elders do pastoral duties. But how many classical Elders (i.e., Elders sitting in a presbytery) do this as classical Elders? How can they personally watch over souls? They cannot perform the duties of Elders in the New Testament sense while acting as Elders in the Presbyterian sense. The implication would therefore be that the Presbyterian conception of an Elder is a misreading of the New Testament.[114] The older conception of a Bishop's power delegated to a curate was actually more honest, they say, than the Presbyterian Elders' presumption that they can exercise pastoral authority over the whole church.[115]

One more incongruity is discovered. In the word it is set forth, say the Dissenting Brethren, that the people of a congregation are to choose the Elders who are to rule over them. This is not possible in the Presbyterian system. Neither are the Elders locally ordained, that is, by the congregation which chooses them, in the Presbyterian system.[116]

It would seem, say the Dissenting Brethren, that in New Testament cases where the Presbyterians see several churches in a city and a presbytery ruling over them, actually a local

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[113] Ibid.

[114] Ibid., p. 9.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

one-congregational presbytery is meant. For, "the New Testament doth indifferently and promiscuously use the word Presbyterie and the word Elders, of the same persons in relation to the same people; and therefore to whom these Elders are supposed to be a Presbyterie, they must beare the relation of Elders."[117]

The Dissenting Brethren next pass to a section of reasons for considering the church of Jerusalem in New Testament times as a single congregation rather than several congregations under a classis. Here their biblical literalism is thoroughgoing. They meticulously add chapter and verse to chapter and verse in an effort at decisive repudiation of the Presbyterian tradition. For instance, Acts 1:14, they met "with one accord." Or, Acts 1:15, they met "together in one and the same company." And Acts 2:1, "They were all with one accord in one place."[118] And so it goes, with several paragraphs of such "proofs" being adduced. Seeming exceptions to the rule are also dealt with. For instance, Acts 4:4 mentions five thousand persons, and certainly these could not constitute only one church. However, say the Dissenting Brethren, it is not at all certain whether this is the number who believed and hence joined the church, or only the number who heard the message.[119] Further, it must not be supposed that

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[117] Ibid., p. 12.

[118] Ibid., p. 15.

[119] Ibid., p. 17.

all of the multitude converted at Jerusalem at Pentecost remained in Jerusalem and became members of the Jerusalem church.[120] Several more pages of detailed arguments about the Jerusalem church follow.

The Dissenting Brethren deny that the actions of the Apostles in the New Testament as Elders over the various churches constitute a pattern and warrant for presbyterial government in future generations of the church; for the Apostles acted primarily as Apostles, and it was by virtue of that once-for-all office which they held in the first setting up of the church that they acted as Elders in various of the churches at the same time. Therefore, "although the Apostles are called Elders, yet they are so called virtually, not formally, and but because Apostleship contained all Offices in it, so as they are Elders but upon this ground, that they are Apostles."[121]

It is claimed by the Presbyterians, say the Dissenting Brethren, that a meeting of the Elders at Jerusalem mentioned in Acts 15 was a presbyterial meeting for the purpose of transacting business of church government. Such was, however, not the case. It had more of the appearance of a synodical meeting for a special purpose, and Synods are "extraordinary and occasional," whereas meetings of presbyteries are "standing and

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[120] Ibid., p. 18.

[121] Ibid., p. 27. We have noted earlier Thomas Goodwin bringing out this argument in his individual writings. See above, pp. 131-32.

ordinary." Further, if Elders from other areas had joined the Elders of the Jerusalem church for the event, the meeting of Jerusalem Elders, even if it be granted to have been a presbytery in the "classical" sense, would have ceased to have been such, and would have become a Synod.[122] And even here it was no formal Synod, with certified commissioners from several churches. Only Jerusalem and Antioch are mentioned. There is no word of the various churches sending commissioners.[123] Further, the presence of Apostles lent infallible authority to the decrees in that era, so that the formal calling of a Synod of Elders of the churches for consultation and judgment would have been a superfluous exercise in this case, Apostles being present.[124]

In conclusion, the Dissenting Brethren contend that the proposition that "the Scripture holds forth that many Congregations may be under one Presbyteriall Government" says in effect that classical presbyteries may be set over congregational presbyteries. Thus are created two kinds of presbyteries, and Scripture will not support this.[125] For when Scripture makes distinctions it is very clear about them. There are special names and titles, and particular marks of distinction. And such is not the case here. They ask: "Doe you read any where God hath set in his Church, first

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[122] Ibid., pp. 30-31.

[123] Ibid., p. 31.

[124] Ibid., pp. 33-35.

[125] Ibid., pp. 38-39.

Presbyteries, secondarily Classes, then Consistories? Or is there any thing in the word directing a different composition or constitution in these?"[126] It is in fact the case, say the Dissenting Brethren, "that for above fifty yeeres after Christ, and in the Apostles times, there was but one kind of Presbytery" (i.e., a congregational presbytery).[127]

I have noted a variety of responses, some of them very bitter, to An Apologeticall Narration. Among these Thomas Edwards' Antapologia took on perhaps semi-official status as the Presbyterian rejoinder in the midst of the conflict with the Independents. In the case of the Reasons, however, there was submitted to Parliament by the Assembly majority an official document, entitled The Answer of the Assembly of Divines unto The Reasons of the Seven Dissenting Brethren, against the Proposition of Divers Congregations, Being United under One Presbyteriall Government.[128] This is a document of considerably greater length than the Dissenting Brethren's Reasons which it is refuting. I shall review its contents here in order to present a more complete picture of the nature of the Presbyterian-Independent controversy in the Assembly of Divines.

The Assembly majority begins by asserting that the

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[126] Ibid., p. 40. [127] Ibid., p. 41.

[128] (London: Printed for Ralph Smith, 1644).

Independents have carried their first argument about Elders (to the effect that ruling power must not extend beyond the realm of preaching and teaching obligations) further than even they themselves intended, and have thereby cut off their own Elders from participation in occasional Synods or from performing pastoral acts in congregations other than their own even in emergency situations.[129]

Rather than being so atomized as the Independents have made it, the "whole Church of Christ" is one, and all members have a relation to and dependence on the Catholic Church. Ephesians 4:3-14 is cited as proof of this.[130] Further, "all the Ministers and Officers of the Church are given to the whole Church for the gathering and building of it, I Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11-12."[131] Such are to teach and rule for the best advantage of the whole church.[132]

When the church was small enough such ministers and officers taught and ruled in "one undivided body." But when the church became larger it was convenient to divide it into congregations. But these were still "joyned together in one externall fellowship and communion of the same publique Profession, and rule of Faith, worship of God, and Ecclesiastical

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[129] Ibid., pp. 47-48. (The Answer is bound with the Reasons in the edition contained in the Huntington Library, and the pagination is continuous. Thus, the first page of the Answer is numbered 47.)

[130] Ibid., p. 48.

[131] Ibid.

[132] Ibid.

Discipline, and practice of love, and the duties of it."[133] So then, "being thus joyned, the Officers and Members should not act or work, as if they were independent Corporations, but only as parts of Christ's body, and are all to regard the common good of the whole, and all things in the greatest advantage of the whole, Eph. 4:1, etc."[134]

The Answer continues, stating that sometimes cases of dissension arise within a congregation, perhaps between people and Elders, or sometimes a whole church is in error, or even several churches. And in all of these cases help is needed from beyond the local situation. It is, therefore, the institution of Christ that for the settling of such cases the congregations are "tied to associate, as much as particular men are tied to associate with a Congregation."[135]

> So in this Association of Congregations their mutuall consent orderly regulated gives them a sufficient call for the Elders to exercise their power of Elders (which is no where any other then ministeriall) and the people their interest in such things as are above mentioned, without impairing or hurting the libertie and priviledges of the Congregations, but rather preserving and strengthening of them.[136]

For the association of congregations is that between members of a family--a relationship between "friends and equalls," not "Masters and Servants."[137] Furthermore, it is the will of

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[133] Ibid.

[134] Ibid., pp. 48-49.

[135] Ibid., p. 49.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid. Numerous Scripture references are given here, relating to the practice of mutual relations between the early church congregations.

Christ that "the communion of Saints not onely internall but also externall among them all should be maintained and increased."[138]

Up to this point there is really much with which the Independents would have agreed, particularly in the general statements about maintaining the communion of saints in the total fellowship of the Church Catholic. It is, therefore, not entirely fair of the Presbyterian majority to imply as they do here that the Independent position of the Dissenting Brethren is the antithesis of everything which they hold. The Presbyterians go on now to say that the "very light of nature" requires that the means of rule, of church order, appointed for individuals, in a congregation, should be extended to whole congregations when circumstances demand it, and there is no prohibition in Scripture.[139] This conflicts, of course, with the generally-held Independent position that nothing should be done without a specific scriptural warrant. The "very light of nature requiring" is simply seventeenth-century way of saying that it is perfectly logical. "The Scripture grounds compared with the light of nature," say the Assembly majority, "are sufficient to satisfie pious and moderate men."[140] Obviously the Independents were not considered to be moderate men, at least not by this stage of the

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[138] Ibid., p. 50.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid., p. 51.

running battle, after the Presbyterians had reacted in shock to An Apologeticall Narration, and now had additionally before them The Reasons.

The Independents are inconsistent, say the framers of the Answer. They will not allow local Elders to act as Elders in a presbytery, saying that they do not have the pastoral power of Elders over all the congregations involved, and therefore should not have the ruling power either. Yet they will allow these same Elders to act as Elders when commissioned by their congregations to sit in an occasional Synod. Why, say the Presbyterians, should not the same prohibitions apply in the case of Elders acting as Elders beyond their own congregations in a Synod as well as in a Presbytery?[141]

In further answer to the Independent point about not extending the power of ruling beyond the power of preaching, the Presbyterians draw a rather fine line between the power itself and the exercise of that power:

> As First, For extending the power of ordinary ruling, beyond the power of ordinary Preaching.
> Wee Answer, This extends not his ordinary power of the one, beyond the ordinary power of the other, but onely the ordinary exercise of the one, beyond the ordinary exercise of the other, having herein a call to the one, and not to the other; which is no incongruity or absurdity. . . . And as for their alledged Scriptures, . . . None of them prove the contrary, they onely shew that . . . this is the ordinary and usuall practice and worke of Elders where their worke lyes, but none of them prove it unlawfull for an Elder upon a call to doe one of these, where they have not occasion, and a call to doe the rest.[142]

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[141] Ibid., p. 52.

[142] Ibid., p. 57.

Again, the Dissenting Brethren's answer here would be that nothing should be done except that which is explicitly warranted by Scripture, that which is commanded by Christ. The Presbyterians, however, say that that may be done which is not expressly forbidden!

The Independents have said that "all the keyes are given together." This, the Presbyterians grant, and point out that the assertion contradicts the Dissenting Brethren's own point "that the power of ruling flowes from their power of Preaching."[143] Secondly, they grant that the one is extendable as far as the other, but contend that both are extendable over the whole church of Christ, only, however, in the case of a specific call to exercise the power which is potentially so extendable.[144]

It is not correct to say, the Answer asserts, that the Presbyterian system makes an Elder the holder of two disproportionate offices at the same time (ruling Elder and Pastor or Teacher). Rather, these are two branches of his one office, and he exercises either one as he is called to do so for the good of the church. As for the possible extension of the Deacon's office beyond a local congregation--which the Independents have piously pointed to as the next possible incongruity which the Presbyterians might resort to--the Answer states that it was so extended at Jerusalem, "and so it may

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[143] Ibid., p. 58.

[144] Ibid.

be still, as the like condition of the Church may require."[145] It is not the case that the Deacon's office may not be extended further than the Pastor's:

> The Deacons Office in the Churches of Asia, was extended to send reliefe to the Churches of Jerusalem, in a time of Famine; when yet they sent not their Preachers to preach to them of Jerusalem, because there was no Famine of the Word; And the Churches at Antioch sent some of their Elders to Preach, where they sent none of their Deacons to distribute almes: All these things are to bee managed and exercised as the common good of the Church doth require.[146]

Thus by a simple appeal to common sense--the good of the church requires a flexibility of responses to different occasions and duties--the Presbyterians succeed in making the Independents' rigid biblicism appear to be the work almost of fanatics. This low-key response in the Answer contrasts markedly with the heated, acid comments of Thomas Edwards in his retort to An Apologeticall Narration, and is really more disarming in its effect than Edwards' attempt to trade blow for blow and then some.

The Assembly majority continues in the Answer to reply to the Independents' every objection, section by section, in this same vein. The answer is signed in behalf of the Assembly of Divines by: "Cornelius Burges, Prolocutor pro tempore; John White, Assessor; Henry Robroughe, Scriba; and Adoniram Byfield, Scriba.[147]

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[145] Ibid., p. 59. [146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid., p. 144.

D. The Savoy Declaration

Jeremiah Burroughes died in 1646. Sidrach Simpson died in 1655. And William Carter died about June, 1658. So by the time that the Synod of the representatives of about one hundred and twenty churches met at the Savoy Palace on September 29, 1658, to better define Congregationalism's faith and doctrine,[148] only Bridge, Goodwin, Greenhill, and Nye were left of the seven Dissenting Brethren. These four, however, joined John Owen and Joseph Caryl on the committee appointed to produce the text of the resultant Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order.

Since the committee's work was approved and used for the Declaration, the document may justly be considered one of the joint statements of the Dissenting Brethren. This is true, of course, to a lesser degree than the documents which we have just been considering, because: (1) Owen and Caryl also participated in the writing[149]; and (2) the Westminster Confession served[150] as the basic substance of the Declaration.

The last section of the Declaration is not dependent upon the Westminster Confession, and is "the most original of the work at the Savoy."[151] It is a "platform of polity" entitled

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[148]Walker, Creeds, p. 348; Paul, An Apologeticall Narration, p. 88.

[149]Owen alone probably wrote the Preface (Walker, Creeds, p. 352).

[150]Above, p. 24.

[151]Walker, Creeds, p. 403.

"Of the Institution of Churches, and the Order Appointed in Them by Jesus Christ."[152] It is this that I shall review here as the last joint contribution of the Dissenting Brethren to the theory of the church held by English Independency in the seventeenth century.

The platform begins with the standard Puritan assertion that Christ is the King and Head of the church.[153] Christ, it continues, calls certain ones "to walk together in particular Societies or Churches, for the mutual edification, and the due performance of that publique Worship, which he requireth of them in this world."[154]

All power to do this is given, the Congregationalists say, to each gathered church. Each particular church is therefore the seat of Christ's power. There is no form of the church given by Christ beyond particular churches.[155] This utter denial of the scriptural validity of the Presbyterian system reads: "Besides these particular Churches, there is not instituted by Christ any Church more extensive or Catholique entrusted with power for the administration of his Ordinances, or the execution of any authority in his name."[156]

A particular gathered church, say the framers of the platform, consists of members and officers chosen by these members.

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[152] Ibid.

[153] Ibid.

[154] Ibid.

[155] Ibid., p. 404.

[156] Ibid.

The members of this church are called to be saints (that is, persons who visibly manifest the fact of their obedience to Christ in their lives, within and without the congregation, and who are "known to each other by their confession of the Faith wrought in them by the power of God").[157] They "willingly consent to walk together according to the appointment of Christ."[158] That is, they covenant together in the congregation.

Christ has appointed as officers for his church, claims the platform, Pastors, Teachers, Elders, and Deacons.[159] Churches presided over by such officers are called visible churches. It is presupposed that any person chosen by a Congregational church as an officer will be seen to have been "fitted and gifted by the holy Ghost" for such an office. The church votes its choice, and sets apart the officer (i.e., ordains him) with fasting and prayer, and imposition of the hands of the already-existing Elders of that church, if such there be.[160]

This is a particularly important point of difference from the Presbyterians. With the Presbyterians clergy ordination is passed on by Elders representing the presbytery. Elders create Elders, in a virtual apostolic succession, though more, perhaps, for the sake of maintaining a correct

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[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid.

order in the church than because of any mechanical theory of authority. Here, however, with the Congregationalists, the authority is directly from Christ to his covenanted congregation, and though it is considered convenient and profitable for ordination to be by an Eldership within the congregation, it is certainly not necessary. It is the election by the people which is most important to the valid setting-up of officers in the church, not the actual ceremony of setting apart. The platform states: "Those who are so chosen, though not set apart by Imposition of Hands, are rightly constituted Ministers of Jesus Christ, in whose Name and Authority they exercise the Ministery to them so committed."[161] Pastors and Teachers are called to be diligent in preaching. This does not, however, mean that others in the congregation not in these offices may not on occasion preach.[162]

The next section reflects Congregationalism's attempt to maintain some degree of state-church responsibility in the Cromwellian era. Some Pastors and Teachers are, the platform states, engaged "in the work of Publique Preaching, and enjoy the Publique Maintenance upon that account."[163] That is, in the rather confused church situation of the 1650's some Pastors and Teachers of gathered particular Congregational churches

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[161] Ibid., p. 405.

[162] Ibid. See above, n. 21, p. 191.

[163] Ibid.

also served as rectors of the parish churches of their towns. The Anglican clergy no longer so functioned there, unless they had gone far toward accommodating to the new order, or were in remote enough areas not to have been noticed by the state authorities. Such Congregational rectors received the tithes of the parish as their Anglican predecessors had. Many Presbyterian clergy also were in this position.

There was some degree of responsibility felt, therefore, for the people of the whole parish. And the Savoy Declaration enjoins upon these Congregational clergy the necessity of not only "constant publique Preaching to them," but enquiring "after their profiting by the Word, instructing them in, and pressing upon them . . . the great Doctrines of the Gospel, even personally and particularly, so far as their strength and time will admit."[164] The line is drawn, nevertheless, at dispensing "the Seals to any other then such as (being Saints by Calling, and gathered according to the Order of the Gospel) they stand related to as Pastors or Teachers."[165] An interesting additional point here is that although preaching may be done on occasion by those not in office, only "teaching Officers" /Pastors and Teachers/ may "administer the Seals."[166]

Every particular church, the platform claims, has power to execute censures in necessary cases. Christ appoints as

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[164] Ibid.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid.

censures admonition and excommunication. "In case of non-admendment upon private admonition, the offense being related to the Church, and the offender not manifesting his repentance, he is to be duely admonished in the Name of Christ by the whole Church, by the Ministery of the Elders of the Church."[167] If this does not result in repentance and amendment of life, "then he is to be cast out by Excommunication with the consent of the Church."[168] Such excommunication applies only to individual members of a particular church, and no power is given by Christ to Synods or other "Ecclesiastical Assemblies" to excommunicate or threaten excommunication.[169]

Ordinary parish churches ostensibly meeting "for the celebration of the Ordinances according to the appointment of Christ" are not necessarily really duly constituted churches. Therefore, the platform states, a believer may join himself with others in a church other than the parish church "for his edification."[170] The early Separatist tendencies of Congregationalism are thus seen here, still in 1658, within this same platform, in continuing tension with the feeling of a certain degree of state-church responsibility which the Congregational movement manifested in the mid-seventeenth century.

Communion and fellowship among sister churches is urged;

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[167] Ibid., p. 406.

[168] Ibid.

[169] Ibid.

[170] Ibid., pp. 406-07.

and even the reception to occasional communion of a member of a church judged less pure than it ideally could be is allowed, as long as the particular member is "credibly testified to be godly, and to live without offence."[171]

Finally, about Synods it is stated:

> In Cases of Difficulties or Differences, either in point of Doctrine or in Administrations, wherein either the Churches in general are concerned, or any one Church in their Peace, Union, and Edification, or any Member or Members of any Church are injured in, or by any proceeding in Censures, not agreeable to Truth, and Order: it is according to the minde of Christ, that many Churches holding communion, do by their Messengers meet in a Synod or Councel, to consider and give their advice in, or about that matter in difference, to be reported to all the Churches concerned; Howbeit these Synods so assembled are not entrusted with any Church-Power, properly so-called, or with any Jurisdiction over the Churches themselves, to exercise any Censures, either over any Churches or Persons, or to impose their determinations on the Churches or Officers.
>
> Besides these occasional Synods or Councels, there are not instituted by Christ any stated Synods in a fixed Combination of Churches, or their Officers in lesser or greater Assemblies; nor are there any Synods appointed by Christ in a way of Subordination to one another.[172]

In the discussion of all these matters of polity--in An Apologeticall Narration, Goodwin and Nye's Preface to Cotton's Keyes, the Reasons of the Dissenting Brethren, and the Savoy Declaration--there is a consistency maintained between the individual writings and the composite statement. The Dissenting Brethren, while naturally emphasizing different aspects of the over-all Congregational Puritan position on

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[171] Ibid., pp. 407-08. [172] Ibid., p. 407.

the church, do not assume different roles in their individual writings and their group statements. The range of their discussion is more limited in the group writings--limited to the major topics of public controversy--matters of polity primarily, rather than broader questions of underlying theory of the church. For this reason it is particularly important to keep in mind the background and context for their group statements on church government--this background and context being the doctrine of the Covenant of Grace which they share with the general Puritan movement; and the corollary doctrine of the church covenant, which participates in the Covenant of Grace, particularizes it for the members of the congregation, and constitutes the crucial mark of Congregational distinctiveness within the Puritan movement. It is on the basis of this understanding of the church as a covenanted congregation of visible saints--revealed most clearly in their individual writings which I have discussed in Chapter VII--that the Dissenting Brethren construct their positions (or, perhaps it should be said, reiterate their positions, this time as a group) on church government vis-à-vis the Presbyterians. It is important to keep this in mind, lest the group statements--taken simply in themselves--give the appearance of arising out of a vacuum, and being somewhat deficient as fully worked-out affirmations on the nature of the church.

PART IV. THE DISSENTING BRETHREN AND THEIR ALLIES

CHAPTER IX

THE THEOLOGICAL INDEPENDENTS

In my chapter of biographical sketches of the Dissenting Brethren[1] I included basic information on several of their leading allies, whose works--emanating from both old and New England--were of decided assistance to the Dissenting Brethren in their struggles in the Assembly and later during the Interregnum. The story of classical Independency after 1640 would be incomplete without reference to some of these works. My attention has been directed in this study primarily to the Dissenting Brethren and their role in the development of early Congregationalism's theory of the church; and I have in no way attempted here a comprehensive survey of early Congregational history and thought. There are, however, several persons whose writings complemented and aided the strivings of the Dissenting Brethren. And a brief look at what they were saying will help to round out for us the theological and historical contexts into which the Dissenting Brethren and their work may be seen to fit.

It will be convenient for purposes of presentation of the material and also because it is true to the nature of the

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[1]Above, Chapter V.

case before us to divide the Dissenting Brethren's major allies into two main groups, whom I shall call the theological Independents and the political Independents. The theological Independents whose writings I shall mention are John Owen, John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, Richard Mather, and John Davenport. These figures stood in much the same line of thinking as the Dissenting Brethren. In their basic conception of the church in the mid-seventeenth century and later, the Congregationalists of old and New England were indeed part of one movement. Different relationships to the state authorities caused differences of opinion on some corollary issues, particularly the issue of toleration the English Independents were forced by their minority position to espouse it, however reluctantly at first; and the New England men in their reconstituted Zion generally saw no reason to open the floodgates to error, and strong reasons against doing so. These differences are, however, peripheral to our main concern here--their definition of the essentials of Christ's church. It is this which I shall concentrate upon in this chapter. In the next chapter, on political Independency, I shall explore the relationship of theologically Congregational Independency to the larger political movement in the 1640's and 1650's which men of the period labeled Independency. Very much involved in this are the questions of toleration and the relationship of Congregational Independency to the sects on its left whose members constituted a large

part of the movement called Independency.

John Owen

John Owen was the primary leader of Congregationalism in the Restoration era. We have seen the Dissenting Brethren cooperating with him in the formulation of the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order of 1658. Contact between Goodwin and Owen in the Restoration period was frequent.[2] It is to his writings that we must now look for a systematization of Congregationalism more complete than that attained by the Dissenting Brethren during their period of dominance in the Independent movement. Owen's writings represent--if one may say this in a most informal way--a kind of period of Congregational scholasticism following immediately upon a time of continuing Reformation.

The major document to be considered is Owen's The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government (1689).[3] There are, however, a number of other relevant treatises as well. Of these I shall consider here: Of Schism: The True Nature of It Discovered and Considered with Reference to the Present Differences in Religion (1657)[4]; and An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order, and Communion of Evangelical Churches.[5]

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[2]Above, p. 74.

[3]William H. Goold, ed., The Works of John Owen, Vol. XVI (1853).

[4]Ibid., Vol. XIII (1852). [5]Ibid., Vol. XV (1851).

In An Inquiry we find this definitional statement:

> The visible church-state which Christ hath instituted under the New Testament consists in an especial society or congregation of professed believers, joined together according to his mind, with their officers, guides, or rulers, whom he hath appointed, which do or may meet together for the celebration of all the ordinances of divine worship, the professing and authoritatively proposing the doctrine of the gospel, with the exercise of the discipline prescribed by himself, unto their own mutual edification, with the glory of Christ, in the preservation and propagation of his kingdom in the world.[6]

Particular churches (that is, Congregational churches), then, are "of a divine original institution."[7] Furthermore, "the primitive churches continued long in that form and order."[8] It is neither scriptural nor true to the primitive church to imagine that there should be church officers (bishops, presbyters, etc.) who are to exercise "a part, half, more or less, of church-power, and not the whole."[9] Here we have again the Independent argument that a ruling elder exercising the power of rule but not of preaching beyond the local church where he is called and set apart is an incongruity. Owen is perhaps more vehement in tone on the matter than the Dissenting Brethren. The Dissenting Brethren complained more in sadness and shock that their opponents could contemplate anything so clearly unscriptural. Owen, however, is militant. He says that the non-Congregational practice is "utterly foreign to

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[6] Ibid., p. 262. The quotation is mostly in italics.

[7] Ibid., p. 313.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., p. 314.

the Scripture, and a monster unto antiquity (I mean that which is pure and regardable in this cause)."[10] The last clause, in parentheses, is an interesting admission that it is necessary to pick and choose among the artifacts of "antiquity" in order to find material fully supporting a Congregational position. Only that which does is, of course, "pure." It would seem that corruptions set in very early.

In Of Schism a church is described as "a society of men called by the word to the obedience of the faith in Christ, and joint performance of the worship of God in the same individual ordinances, according to the order of Christ prescribed."[11] There will be cases, Owen says, where a man is unable to join himself to such a particular church, and yet may be "a member of the catholic church of Christ, be united to him by the inhabitation of his Spirit, and participation of life from him."[12] Such, however, is not the normal case. The believer is required where possible to join himself "to some one of those churches of Christ, that therein he may abide, in 'doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers,' according to the order of the gospel."[13]

Christ, Owen continues, instituted particular churches, appointed officers in them, and furnished them with gifts of the Spirit for the right performance of their work. Further,

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., Vol. XIII, p. 174.

[12] Ibid., p. 175.

[13] Ibid., p. 176.

"rules, cautions, and instructions for the due settlement of those churches were given by him."[14] And "those churches were made the only seat of that worship which in particular he expressed his will to have continued until he came."[15] Such particular churches were to continue as thus instituted until his coming again. That they were to continue in their scriptural state only "for a season," and then be replaced by other forms of the church "is a difficult task for any man to undertake to evince."[16]

In the introduction to his edition of John Owen's The True Nature of a Gospel Church and Its Government,[17] John Huxtable claims that "the Anglican [and, presumably, the Presbyterian] who reads these pages will see that he makes a grave mistake if he supposes that Congregationalists have thought lightly of the Church."[18] And the Congregationalists, members of that group of churchmen who are "the spiritual descendents of the Brownists,"[19] will, by reading this tract by Owen, "be made to behold the pit whence [they were] digged."[20] Here, I

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[14]Ibid., p. 177.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid.

[17](London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1947). It is Huxtable's edition which I am using here. There are no changes in the wording of the text, only omissions of repetitive material. I have also consulted the Goold edition [Owen's Works, Vol. XVI].

[18]Ibid., p. 12.

[19]Ibid., p. 21.

[20]Ibid., p. 16.

think, we find Congregationalism more fully systematized than it had been to this point.

The New Testament churches, Owen states, were particular churches.[21] Persons "enter into a church-state [i.e., constitute a New Testament-type church] by mutual confederation [covenanting together] or solemn agreement for the performance of all the duties which the Lord Christ hath prescribed unto his disciples in such churches."[22] The "formal cause" of such church-state is, then, the church covenant, which is related to the Covenant of Grace by way of participation in it.[23]

The Lord is more honored, Owen says, the more such a covenant is an "express engagement." It may, however, be "virtually only observed," that is, implicit, understood to exist as the basis of the church's being, but not taking the form of an actual written covenant.[24]

A church covenant is further defined by Owen, quite succinctly, as:

> an obediental act of believers, in such numbers as may be useful unto the ends of church-edification, jointly giving themselves unto the Lord Jesus Christ, to do and observe all his commands, resting on the promise of his especial presence thereon, giving and communicating, by his law, all the rights, powers, and priviledges of his church unto them; and in a mutual agreement among themselves jointly to perform all the duties required of them in that state, with an especial subjection unto the spiritual authority of rules and rulers appointed

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[21] Ibid., p. 35.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., pp. 37-38.

[24] Ibid., p. 39.

by Christ in that state.[25]

Rule in the church, Owen declares, is the exercise of Christ's authority, given to the whole church "actu primo, or fundamentally" by Christ, and actu secundo, or in its exercise" to the officers called to the position of rulers.[26] The only purpose of this rule is the "edification" of believers, and not any power of secular coercion or grandeur.[27] The rule is, therefore, "ministerial, consisting in an authoritative declaration and application of the commands and will of Christ . . . wherein those who exercise it are servants unto the church."[28]

The Apostles, Owen says, had an extraordinary power, which ceased with their passing. It was "antecedent unto the existence of any gospel church-state properly so-called."[29] Therefore, the Presbyterians may not use as an argument for the extension of the power of the Elders beyond the local church the fact that the Apostles acted as Elders in all the churches. They were acting primarily as Apostles, and Elders elected and set apart after their time did not have the same power.

There are, Owen says, two kinds of church officers: Bishops and Deacons (Philippians 1:1).[30] The Bishops (Elders)

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., pp. 41-42.

[27] Ibid., p. 42.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., pp. 43-44.

[30] Ibid., p. 51.

have the "power of order," and the "power for rule." Some (Pastors and Teachers) have both, others have only the latter. The power of order includes the "authority to teach and administer the sacraments."[31]

Owen affirms the power of the keys, of binding and loosing, in the usual literal manner of seventeenth-century Congregationalism. Such is given to the whole church, but exercised ministerially by the Elders.[32] He follows this with fairly extensive descriptions of the ministerial duties of Pastors and Teachers in the church, and the supplementary duties of ruling Elders.[33] As with the Dissenting Brethren, the office of Teacher is affirmed to be distinct from that of Pastor, though "his office is of the same kind" (that is, equal in status with that of the Pastor).[34] Through the diligent performance of the duties of these offices, he exhorts, "let the state of the church be preserved and kept unto its original constitution, which is congregational, and no other."[35]

The rule of the church exercised by its officers "consists in a spiritual influence on the consciences of men."[36] Sometimes it becomes necessary, by Christ's warrant,[37] to extend this power of rule to the point of exclusion of one who

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Ibid., pp. 59-60.

[33] Ibid., Chapters V, VI and VII.

[34] Ibid., p. 77.

[35] Ibid., p. 80.

[36] Ibid., p. 89.

[37] Ibid., p. 110.

has engaged in "a wilful deviation from the rules and laws of the society."[38] Such exclusion is part of the "disciplinary" (in distinction from the "doctrinal and declarative") power of the keys granted by Christ to the church. Of it Owen says:

> It hath a direct institution: Matt. 18:15-20. . . . The rejection of an offending brother out of the society of the church, leaving him, as to all the privileges of the society of the church, in the state of a heathen, declaring him liable unto the displeasure of Christ and everlasting punishment, without repentance, is the excommunication we plead for; and the power of it, with its exercise, is here plainly granted by Christ and ordained in the church.[39]

Such excommunication may be pronounced by a church through its Elders only against a person who is a member of that church, that is, one who has willingly consented, covenanted, to abide by the rule of that church.[40]

This may be done only in cases when the fact of "scandalous sin" is clear.[41] The purpose should be "corrective, not vindictive"; that is, the church should have "compassion" for the "distressed state" of the one cut off, and an eager "readiness for the restoration of love in all the fruits of it," should the person be lead in his conscience by the extreme measures taken against him to repent.[42] And finally, "all prejudices, all partiality, all provocations, all haste and

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[38] Ibid., p. 108.

[39] Ibid., p. 111.

[40] Ibid., p. 114.

[41] Ibid., p. 115.

[42] Ibid., p. 117.

precipitation, are most carefully to be avoided in this administration, for the judgment is the Lord's."[43]

Owen urges active communion among the Congregational churches. He says: "The communion of the churches is their joint actings in the same gospel duties towards God in Christ, with their mutual actings towards each other with respect unto the end of their institution and being, which is the glory of Christ in the edification of the whole catholic church."[44] The "outward acts" of such communion, Owen continues, come under the heads of "advice and assistance."[45]

Advice is gained through participation in Synods or Councils. "Synods are the meetings of divers churches by their messengers or delegates, to consult and determine of such things as are of common concernment unto them all by virtue of this communion which is exercised in them."[46] Such Synods are warranted by the "light of nature," by the individual churches' mutual participation in the "one body mystical," and by "apostolical example."[47] The power of appeal to conscience is the only means of enforcement which a Synod possesses for its determinations.[48]

Owen sounds most like Thomas Goodwin of the five Dissenting Brethren. Goodwin is systematic in the manner of Owen, but

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[43] Ibid., p. 118.
[44] Ibid., p. 124.
[45] Ibid., p. 126.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., pp. 126-27.
[48] Ibid., pp. 131-32.

is more repetitive. There is the same insistence upon a Christ-given order in the church. Owen is more dogmatic about this being the only scripturally-warranted form of the church; but Goodwin is not far behind him in this.

Owen joins the Dissenting Brethren generally in seeing the church-covenant as the cause or basic formative principle for constituting "church-state." He makes the same point which Jeremiah Burroughes made about this covenant being preferably explicit.

"Rule" in the church is seen in the same light as the Dissenting Brethren see it--as being exercised authoritatively by the Elders of the congregation, and yet "ministerially," that is, for pastoral purposes. It is to be done in the capacity of servants and not legalistically or in a spirit of secular grandeur, the manners of operation of the Presbyterians and Anglicans respectively, according to the Independent leaders. Nor may the example of the Apostles' rule in several churches at once serve as a valid present-day pattern, say both Owen and the Dissenting Brethren (particularly Goodwin). That "rule" may in some cases mean the firm application of exclusion or excommunication, that the advice of Synods is sometimes required by individual congregations, and that communion of the churches in the one mystical body of Christ should be a highly sought-after goal are all positions which John Owen shares with the Dissenting Brethren.

John Cotton

John Cotton's importance for the Dissenting Brethren has been alluded to several times in this study.[49] I have reviewed Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye's summary of important statements in Cotton's Of the Keyes of the Kingdome of Heaven. I shall not deal further with that tract, since it is quite adequately summarized in Larzer Ziff, The Career of John Cotton.[50] Instructive for our purposes here, however, will be a brief look at three more of Cotton's works: The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared[51]; Certain Queries[52]; and The True Constitution of a Particular Visible Church.[53] These

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[49]See above, pp. 72-73, 212. [50]Pp. 191-96.

[51]The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared: In Two Treatises: In the Former, From the Historical Aspersions of Mr. Robert Baylie, in His Book, Called /A Disswasive from the Errors of the Time./ In the Latter, From Some Contradictions of Vindicae Clavium: And from Some Mis-constructions of Learned Mr. Rutherford in His Book Intituled /The Due Right of Presbyteries./ (London: Printed by Matthew Simmons, for John Bellamie, 1648).

[52]Certain Queries Tending to the Mutuall Accomodation & Communion of Presbyterian and Congregational Churches; Delivered in 11 Propositions, & Humbly Presented Both to the Consideration and Examination of Them According to God (London: Printed by M.S. for John Allen and Francis Eglesfield, 1654).

[53]The True Constitution of a Particular Visible Church, Proved by Scripture. Wherein is Briefly Demonstrated by Questions and Answers What Officers, Worship, and Government Christ Hath Ordained in His Church (London: Printed for Samuel Satterthwaite, 1642). The Doctrine of the Church, to Which Is Committed the Keyes of the Kingdome of Heaven (London: Printed for Ben: Allen, 1644) is the same work, with a brief conclusion added to it about the gathering of churches being no offense to the civil magistrate.

shed further light upon the way in which one of the major direct influences upon the Dissenting Brethren's thought spelled out his Congregationalism.

In The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared Cotton admits that there was indeed a conference between himself and Thomas Goodwin and John Davenport at London. Surely, however, he says "a poor weake thing as my selfe" could not have effected a change in such eminent and learned servants of God as Goodwin and Davenport. Any change was certainly made by "the Spirit and Word of Grace."[54] Cotton adds: "But whether Mr. Davenport and Mr. Goodwin received ought from me, I doe not know, sure I am, I have received much from them."[55] This must, of course, be recognized as part of the virtually ritual modesty contained in the writings of the period. Most of the works published by these men are "humbly presented." Cotton further denies having written to Goodwin from New England--that is, he says that he does not remember having done so.[56]

In "The Second Part /of The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared/ (Being Doctrinal, and Controversal) concerning Congregational Churches and Their Government"[57] Cotton asserts that

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[54]Cotton, The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared, pp. 23-24. See above, pp. 72-73.

[55]Ibid., p. 24. [56]Ibid., p. 26.

[57]The pagination of this begins again with page 1. It is an answer to the anonymous author of Vindiciae Clavium, directed against Cotton. Cotton calls the author "the Avenger" and "Vindex."

the Scripture nowhere speaks of a Catholic Visible Church. "The Catholick Church is not Visible as a Church: and the Church that is Visible, is not Catholick."[58] The "Visible Church," that is, a particular church, is part of what the Scripture means by "the Kingdom of Heaven, whereof Peter received the Keyes."[59] Also meant is the "Invisible Mystical Church," but not exclusively.[60] The two are intimately related, and together they have the power of the keys granted to them.

Not only the Invisible Church is built upon a rock, "for Particular Churches are built upon a Rock also. Built they are upon Divine Institution, and Christ is laid for the foundation of them; or else they are not Churches of Christ."[61] The keys of the kingdom of heaven were given to Peter to bind sins on earth "generally and indefinitely, in every Particular Church on earth."[62]

Cotton's Certain Queries Tending to . . . Accomodation is very grudging in its accommodation, and addresses the Presbyterians with an invitation to limited fellowship in much the same spirit as the Vatican Council of 1870-71 displayed when it invited Protestant observers by means of a letter to "heretics, schismatics, and other infidels." Before reverting to

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[58]Cotton, The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared, the Second Part, p. 5.

[59]Ibid., p. 6.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid., pp. 6-7.

[62]Ibid., p. 8.

this style, however, Cotton does begin in a rather promising ecumenical spirit by acknowledging that "Congregations of Christians subject to Presbyteriall Government" "(for the Matter of them) consist of visible Saints (at least a principall part of them)," and "for the Forme; they doe agree together in choosing their owne Minister, in attending duely to the Ministry of the Word and Sacraments, and in submitting to the Doctrine of the Gospel." This, Cotton continues, "implyeth [on the part of the Presbyterians] a reall and visible (though implicite) profession of the Covenant of grace requisite to Church-estate."[63]

Cotton in the early 1650's, then, was still advocating the Congregational form of church government as most clearly scriptural. This is shown vividly in the reluctance which he shows in the tract Certain Queries to acknowledge the Christian equality of the Presbyterians. A form of Christianity leading to salvation Presbyterianism may be. Indeed, he concedes this. But it is less pure than the Congregational way. Certain Queries was published in 1654--two years after Cotton's death.

For a final delineation of Cotton's militant Congregationalism, I turn now to The True Constitution of a Particular Visible Church, published in 1642 and 1644,[64] at the time of the warmest exchanges between the Presbyterians and Independents

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[63] Certain Queries, pp. 1-2.

[64] See n. 53 this chapter.

on church government in the Assembly, and in print outside the Assembly. Here Cotton defines the church as "a Mysticall body whereof Christ is the Head, the members and Saints called out of the World and united together into one Congregation by an holy covenant to worship the Lord, and to edifie one another in all his holy Ordinances."[65] Much of what follows is identical with the Catechism by Thomas Goodwin to which I have made reference earlier.[66] The list of duties of a ruling Elder which I have quoted from Goodwin's Catechism[67] is, for instance, contained in this work by Cotton in virtually identical form, with only the change of an occasional word.[68] Goodwin's Catechism is longer and more detailed. He has obviously made direct use (or his editors have made direct use, in compiling this from Goodwin's manuscripts after his death) of much of Cotton's work verbatim, and without acknowledgment. Such copying was not, of course, unusual practice at the time.

Cotton's True Constitution is particularly clear on the matter of the congregational presbytery. I quote this section by way of conclusion to our look at Cotton's work which influenced the Independency of the Dissenting Brethren:

> Quest. To whom hath Christ committed the Government of his Church?
> Ans. Partly to the Body of the Church, in respect of the state or frame of it, but principally to the Presbitery, in respect of the Order or Administration of it.
> . . . . . .

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[65] P. 1.

[66] Above, pp. 150-52.

[67] Above, pp. 151-52.

[68] Cotton, The True Constitution, p. 3.

> Quest. What power of Government is committed to the Presbitery?
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> Ans. To call the Church together and to deliver the Counsell of God to them with all Authority, to prepare matters for the Churches hearing, and to propound and order them in the Assembly, to administer Ordinations and Censures and to dismisse the Assembly, with a blessing in the Name of the Lord.[69]

Cotton's point about there being nowhere a "Catholic Visible Church" is made by the Dissenting Brethren and John Owen together in the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order. The church becomes visible in particular covenanted congregations. Cotton shares with Thomas Goodwin especially the stress on a literal and personal application within the congregation of the keys of the kingdom granted to Peter. Cotton's attempt, however reluctant, to accommodate with the Presbyterians parallels the earlier English Independent attempts to effect a working agreement in the Westminster Assembly with the Presbyterians there. Neither he nor the Dissenting Brethren considered Presbyterianism to be entirely without Christian merit. But both were sure that it was a less correct reading of scriptural warrants than the Independent way.

Thomas Hooker

I have noted[70] that Hooker, although he refused to come to the Westminster Assembly in person, contributed to the Independent cause in England vis-à-vis the Presbyterians with the publication of A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline.

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[69] Ibid., pp. 9-10.

[70] Above, pp. 84-85.

Wherein, the Way of the Churches of New-England is Warranted out of the Word, and All Exceptions of Weight, Which Are Made against It, Answered. . . .[71] That this treatise is part and parcel of the movement which we have been considering on both sides of the Atlantic is shown by the fact that this edition contains commendatory epistles by both John Cotton and Thomas Goodwin. Goodwin states that he has been entrusted with the charge of seeing the treatise through the press, in this year after Hooker's death. The original draft, sent over two years before, had perished in the sea.

Of particular interest here in the light of what the Dissenting Brethren were saying in their individual writings about the Covenant of Grace and the church-covenants of particular visible churches is Hooker's Chapter IV, entitled "Of the Formall Cause of a Visible Church, the Church Covenant." Herein he states that while the material cause of a visible church is visible Saints, the "Formall cause, that which makes the Church to be that which it is and gives the specificall nature . . . thereunto is the church covenant."[72] He continues: "Mutuall covenanting and confoederating of the Saints in the fellowship of the faith according to the order of the Gospel, is that which gives constitution and being to a visible Church."[73]

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[71](London: Printed by A. M. for John Bellamy, 1648).

[72]Ibid., p. 45.

[73]Ibid., p. 46.

"This confoederating and covenanting implies two things," Hooker says:

> 1. The Act that is performed betwixt some men for the while, and so passeth away in the expression.
> 2. The State arising from the Act of obligation, which is nothing else but that relation of these persons thus obliged one to another.[74]

Hooker goes on to make the standard distinction between implicit and explicit covenants in the congregations, and allows, as the Independents generally do, that an implicit covenant may be sufficient to guarantee that a congregation is a true church of Christ.[75] But an explicit covenant, where possible, is much to be preferred:

> Its most according to the compleatnesse of the rule, and for the better being of the Church, that there be an explicite covenant. For
> 1. Thereby the judgment of the members comes to be informed and convinced of their duty more fully.
> 2. They are thereby kept from cavilling and starting aside from the tenure and terms of the covenant, which they have professed and acknowledged before the Lord and so many witnesses.
> 3. Thereby their hearts stand under a stronger tye, and are more quickened and provoked to doe that, which they have before God and the congregation, ingaged themselves to doe.[76]

Thus, without following Hooker further in his detailed explication of these matters, we observe this important leader of the New England branch of mid-seventeenth century Congregationalism avowing the centrality of the church-covenant to the life of the particular visible church in much the same manner

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[74] Ibid. [75] Ibid., p. 48.

[76] Ibid., pp. 48-49.

as the Dissenting Brethren did.

Hooker's way of breaking down the covenanting together into two parts--the initial act, and the state of mutual relations arising from the act--constitutes an additional point of clarification which I have not found stated just this way in the writings of the Dissenting Brethren. It serves to point up the situation of continuing mutual obligations which obtains in the congregation of a particular visible church once the church covenant has been created and accepted as a living basis for Congregational church life. This is further reinforced by what he says about an explicit church covenant keeping members of the congregation vividly aware of their commitment to Christ's rule through his officers and their resulting duties.

Richard Mather and John Davenport

I have related above[77] the circumstances of the writing of Church-Government and Church-Covenant Discussed, by Richard Mather and John Davenport.[78] A brief consideration of some

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[77]P. 66.

[78]Church-Government and Church-Covenant Discussed, in an Answer of the Elders of the Severall Churches in New-England to Two and Thirty Questions, Sent Over to Them by Divers Ministers in England, to Declare Their Judgments Therein. Together with an Apologie of the Said Elders in New-England for Church-Covenant, Sent Over in Answer to Master Bernard in the Yeare 1639. As also in an Answer to Nine Positions about Church-Government . . . (London: The first part printed by R.O. and G.D. for Benjamin Allen, 1643; the second and third parts printed by T.P. and M.S. for Benjamin Allen, 1643).

of the contents of this work will complete our inspection of portions of the writings of the Dissenting Brethren's major theological allies.

In the first part of this treatise, the answer to the thirty-two questions sent over from England, Richard Mather explains that they in New-England regard the "matter" of a visible church as "Saints by calling, Visible Christians and Believers, I Cor. 1:2, Eph. 1:1"[79]; "and the forme, a gathering together of these visible Christians, a combining and uniting of them into one body, by the bond of an holy Covenant."[80] Further:

> They that are within the visible Church as Members thereof, must needs be Members of some particular Congregation, because all visible Churches are Congregationall, as Mr. Baine[81] sheweth at large from the Church of Antioch, Acts 14:27, the Church at Corinth, I Cor. 11 & 14.[82]

Mather also has provided, in this same section, a clear delineation of the relative powers of Elders in a congregational presbytery, and the people who choose them and then are privileged to obey them:

> Wee doe believe that Christ hath ordained that there should be a Presbytery or Eldership, I Tim. 4:14. And that in every Church, Tit. 1:15. Acts 14:23. I Cor. 12:28. whose worke is to teach and rule the Church by the Word and lawes of Christ, I Tim. 5:17. and unto whom so teaching and ruling, all the people ought to be obedient and submit themselves, Heb. 13:17. And therefore a Government meerly Popular or Democraticall . . .

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[79] Ibid., p. 9. [80] Ibid.

[81] Paul Baynes, see above, p. 192 (n. 27, Chap. VIII).

[82] Ibid., p. 10.

> is farre from the practice of these Churches, and we believe farre from the minde of Christ.
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> Secondly, neverthelesse a Government meerely Aristocratical, wherein the Church government is so in the hands of some Elders, as that the rest of the body are wholly excluded from entermedling by way of power therein, such a government we conceive also to be without Warrant of the Word, and likewise to be injurious to the people, as infringing that liberty which Christ hath given to them in choosing their owne Officers, in admitting of Members, and censuring of offenders, even Ministers themselves when they be such.[83]

Here we have spelled out the "middle-way" spoken of by the Dissenting Brethren in An Apologeticall Narration.

The second section of this treatise is fully entitled An Apologie of the Churches in New-England for Church-Covenant. Or, A Discourse Touching the Covenant between God and Men, and Especially concerning Church-Covenant, That Is to Say, the Covenant Which a Company Doe Enter into when They Become a Church; and Which a Particular Person Enters into when He Becomes a Member of a Church. Sent Over in Answer to Master Bernard in the Yeare 1639. And Now Published for the Satisfaction of All Who Desire Resolution in this Point.[84] Mather here speaks in the usual Puritan fashion of the Covenants of Works and Grace. Then he speaks of one's personal covenant with God based on the Covenant of Grace, and entered into at one's conversion. From this he passes to church-covenant.[85]

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[83] Ibid., pp. 47-48.

[84] The pagination begins again with the second part, and is then continuous through the third part.

[85] An Apologie of the Churches in New-England for Church-Covenant /the second part of Church-Government and Church-Covenant Discussed/, pp. 1-3.

The personal covenant is "private and particular," and the church-covenant is "generall and publick."[86]

He continues:

> A Covenant taken thus generally when it respects spirituall blessings and spirituall duties, in the Communion of Saints, is that which is called Church-covenant, which Church-Covenant differs not in substance of the things promised from that which is between the Lord and every particular soule, but onely in some other respects; as first, the one is of one Christian in particular, the other of a company joyntly together. Secondly, if right Order be observed, a man ought not to enter into Church-Covenant, till he be in Covenant with God before, in respect of his personall estate. Thirdly, the one is usually done in private, as in a mans Closet between the Lord and his soule, and the other in some publick assembly. Fourthly, The one in these dayes is of such duties as the Gospel requires of every Church and the members thereof.[87]

Mather states without reservation "that this is that whereby a company of Christians doe become a Church: It is the Constituting forme of a Church."[88] The church covenant, as "forme" of the church, is

> a uniting or combining, or knitting of those Saints together into one visible body, by the band of this holy Covenant. Some union or band there must be amongst them, whereby they come to stand in a new relation to God, and one towards another, other then they were in before: or els they are not yet a Church, though they be fit materialls for a Church; even as soule and body are not a man, unlesse they be united; nor stones and timber a house, till they be compacted and conjoyned.[89]

Mather goes then into elaborate detail about church-covenant. Sufficient material has now been brought forward

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[86] Ibid., p. 3.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid., p. 5.

[89] Ibid.

from his treatise to serve as clear illustration of the fact that there was a striking continuity among Congregationalists on the church-covenant idea as central and crucial to the church's very foundation. And this continuity is to be seen not only chronologically, from Browne and Barrow through the Dissenting Brethren and John Owen in England, but geographically as well, that is, on both sides of the Atlantic. The clear spelling-out of the Covenant of Grace here as basis for church-covenant is particularly reminiscent of the writings of William Bridge in this regard.

In concluding this chapter we shall consider now a small portion of John Davenport's contribution to Church-Government and Church-Covenant Discussed, the third section, fully entitled An Answer of the Elders of the Severall Churches in New-England unto Nine Positions, Sent Over to Them (By Divers Reverend and Godly Ministers in England) to Declare Their Judgements Therein. Written in the Yeer, 1639. And Now Published for the Satisfaction of All Who Desire Resolution in Those Points.

Of particular interest herein is Davenport's dire warning against "the evill and pernicious consequences of extending Communion in Church-priviledges beyond the bond of Church-fellowship."[90] One of these consequences is that "the ordinary office of Pastours and Teachers, will be much confounded, if

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[90] Ibid., p. 69.

[they] be illimited . . . in the execution of their office, beyond the bounds of their owne particular Churches."[91] Here we have the English Independents' contention that the power of rule should not be extended beyond the scope of pastoral responsibility stated also on the New England side of the Atlantic.

Another point of special interest is contained in Davenport's description of the institution of church-covenant. He gives in two paragraphs a description of such a covenant in the typical terms of mutual relations and mutual obligations in Christ under the Covenant of Grace. Then in a third paragraph he spells out an implication which is not new, but which is usually not constructed so explicitly. It concerns the obligation of one who has voluntarily agreed to the covenant to humbly submit himself to the judgment and censure of the congregation with which he has covenanted, when they deem it necessary:

> Thirdly, These promises they are lawfully and mutually made, that members (as also the whole Church) are bound not onely every one for himself actually to performe them, but passively also to suffer his Brethren to doe these offices upon and towards himselfe; if he neglect his former, he shall falsifie his Covenant, before God, Angells, and men made, and so not onely breake promise to his Brethren, contrary to Psal. 15:4. but also in some sort commit the sinne of Ananias and Saphira, in lying to the holy Ghost, condemned and punished secretly by Gods own hand, Acts 5:3, 10. If he failes in the latter, he shall not onely be guiltie of the same sinne of the breach of Covenant with God and man, as in the former, but shall adde unto it this folly

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91 Ibid.

of despising counsell so much commended, Prov. 12:15; 1:7. And shall also proclaime this his folly and pride, by shewing to all the Church that he is wise in his own eyes, and leane unto his own wisdome, both reproved, Prov. 3:7; 13:4. Seeing need of no further light to be held forth by his brethren, then what he apprehends himselfe, which is one of the greatest properties of folly it self.[92]

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[92] Ibid., pp. 73-74.

CHAPTER X

THE "POLITICAL" INDEPENDENTS

The early nineteenth-century historian of Congregationalism, Benjamin Hanbury, credited the Dissenting Brethren with being great champions of religious liberty, of toleration for all.[1] Such was generally the view of them taken by an older generation of historians, who saw the Independents as the originating point of the budding movement toward democracy.[2] More contemporary historians, however, have revised this view considerably (though not entirely reversed it). George L. Mosse, for example, in his article "Puritanism Reconsidered,"[3] says that "demands for religious liberty need not mean demands for political liberty as well."[4] He commends Leo F. Solt for pointing out, in opposition to A. S. P. Woodhouse, that "the 'Saints' did not proclaim the spiritual equality of all mankind but only the spiritual

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[1]See above, p. 63.

[2]See, for instance, G. P. Gooch, English Democratic Ideas in the Seventeenth Century (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1959; first pub. 1898), pp. 110ff.

[3]Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte, Jahrgang 55 (1964), Heft 1, 37-47.

[4]Ibid., p. 46.

equality of the Saints."[5]

The "Saints," at least that group of them whose work we have had occasion to take particular notice of in this dissertation, were mostly interested in religious liberty for themselves, that is for the truth as they saw it. Insofar as this demand necessarily became a demand for general religious liberty, the latter demand was a pragmatic thing to them primarily. They came to see that religious liberty for the Independents necessarily involved religious liberty for other groups of self-professed "Saints" as well, Saints who were for the most part involved in sects to the left of them theologically--such as the Quakers, Diggers, Levellers, and Fifth-Monarchy Men.

The Dissenting Brethren and their allies in the Assembly did by no means, however, set out to lead a general crusade for liberty of conscience, religious or political, based on abstract principles of the rights of man. Because of the Presbyterians' rather vehement objections to their independent existence, their only recourse in the later 1640's--if they were to survive--was reluctantly to abandon hope of close association with these their more natural allies theologically, and to make common cause with the men of the sects. Thus Baillie saw Independency as "the hand that knits all Sects

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[5]Ibid. The reference is to Leo F. Solt, Saints in Arms: Puritanism and Democracy in Cromwell's England (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Univ. Press, 1959), p. 90.

together."[6] And W. K. Jordan writes:

> Independency became the focal point around which the various sects and minority groups, threatened by Presbyterian intolerance, were to rally, gaining before many years had elapsed sufficient strength and unity of purpose to demolish at the moment of its fruition the ecclesiastical structure which the Presbyterians had elaborated with Calvinistic honestly and thoroughness in the deliberations of the Westminster Assembly.[7]

Jordan adds further:

> It was advocacy of the principle of religious toleration which set the Independents apart and since this principle gained for them the support of the sects, Independency was inevitably to be forced to the left by the radicalism of the diverse groups fused under its leadership.[8]

"The Independents" spoken of here by Baillie in the seventeenth century and Jordan in the twentieth are, however, not primarily the Congregational Independents led by the Dissenting Brethren. To be sure the Dissenting Brethren and their allies were a part, and an important part, of the struggle for religious liberty against the Presbyterians. Their continuing advocacy of a minority position in the Assembly, and their publication of An Apologeticall Narration, assured this. But it was not they who led the broader struggle for political Independency participated in by the sects, many of whose members received their first inspiration through experiences

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[6]Baillie, The Disswasive . . . Vindicated from the Exceptions of Mr. Cotton . . . , p. 11.

[7]Jordan, The Development of Religious Toleration, Vol. III, p. 49.

[8]Ibid., p. 51.

in Cromwell's army.

Leo Solt has pointed out that those "Independents" for whom general liberty of conscience was "a basic tenet" were those whom George Yule has dubbed "radical" Independents.[9] They advocated, Solt says, "religious toleration and experiential religion." They were not, though, Independents "in the more 'orthodox' sense--i.e., they did not subscribe to either the ecclesiastical or the theological views of the Congregational 'Dissenting Brethren.'"[10]

Prominent examples of such non-orthodox Independents are the "Antinomian" chaplains in the parliamentary army, William Dell and John Saltmarsh, of whom Solt writes extensively in Saints in Arms. Free grace and the purging work of

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[9]Solt, p. 7. The reference is to George Yule's The Independents in the English Civil War (Cambridge: The University Press, 1958), written primarily as a refutation to J. H. Hexter's article "The Problem of the Presbyterian Independents" (The American Historical Review, XLIV (Oct., 1938), 29-49). Yule's conclusions and methodology have been in turn criticized by David Underdown, in his article "The Independents Reconsidered" (The Journal of British Studies, III (May, 1964) 57-83). There have also been replies by Hexter in his review of Yule's book in The American Historical Review, LXIV (1958-59), 362-63; and in his Reappraisals in History (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963; first pub. 1961). This rather fascinating exchange is concerned with the "Independents" in Parliament and their possible Presbyterian leanings. It is not directly relevant to the purposes of this dissertation, except as it serves to further point up the existence of such an Independent party in the Parliament, which was "allied with Independent churchmen in the Assembly" (Yule, p. 29).

[10]Solt, p. 7.

the Holy Spirit in the lives of sinners elected for salvation are central tenets.[11] Solt writes: "Saltmarsh asserted that regeneration through Christ had come to believers without any acts of faith, obedience, and repentance on their part."[12] God gives faith. It is not a condition of salvation. That would be a popish gospel of justification by works.[13] "Antinomian preachers rejected the contractural relationship between God and man of Federal Theology. . . . In place of the Covenant Theology [they] ascribed everything to the role of the indwelling Spirit or Free Grace in bringing salvation to the saints."[14] Hugh Peter, another prominent Independent army chaplain, Solt sees as occupying a middle position theologically--holding formally to covenant theology, but believing that "the duties binding upon man in the covenant largely consisted of an acceptance of the grace of God."[15]

None of this is to indicate that the Congregational Independents denied free grace. Rather, as we have seen, they affirmed it as part of the basic underpinning of the covenant theology. They simply did not wish to deny man a clearly-defined means of active participation in the divine plan of salvation. Thus the covenant was seen to involve mutual obligations between God and man.[16]

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[11] Ibid., pp. 30-31.

[12] Ibid., p. 30.

[13] Ibid., pp. 30-31.

[14] Ibid., p. 41.

[15] Ibid., p. 33.

[16] Ibid.

Yule mentions that Richard Baxter distinguishes four types of Independents in existence after Pride's Purge. These are: Vanists (probably upper gentry, named after Sir Henry Vane the Younger (1613-1662), one of the early leaders of the Independents in Parliament[17]); Independents as such (conservatives or Congregationalists); other sects (radical Independents politically, who were instrumental in holding the king's trial and execution; generally the Army party, which forced the Presbyterians out of Parliament); and the "Democraticall Party" (the left wing of the radicals, primarily Levellers, or persons who would have changed not only the form of government and opted for nearly complete toleration, but who would have changed the underlying social structure of England as well; these are persons--such as John Lilburne--to whom Cromwell, essentially aristocratic in his outlook, found himself, in time, bitterly opposed).[18]

A. S. P. Woodhouse, in his introduction to Puritanism and Liberty, lists four main groups as victors of the First Civil War. The Presbyterians he refers to as the "Party of the Right."[19] They "wished to limit the objectives of the Revolution: to assert the effectual sovereignty not of the people but of Parliament, and to preserve at all costs the sanctity of property, whether real, personal, or political

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[17]Yule, p. 29.

[18]Ibid., p. 64.

[19]Woodhouse, p. 16.

(the historic rights of the Crown and the material possessions of the Church alone excepted)," he says.[20] The Presbyterians hoped to keep the monarchy, shorn of many of its traditional powers, as a continuing guarantee of an essentially conservative and stable social order.[21] The "Party of the Centre," according to Woodhouse, was made up of the Independents as such, the theological Independents whose creed the Dissenting Brethren in the Assembly represented. They held, Woodhouse contends, to King and Parliament as long as it was consistent with that essentially conservative social position which they more or less shared with the Presbyterians. But opposition from the Presbyterians forced them, "partly through force of circumstances, but partly through a logical development of their own basic doctrines,"[22] to become "the party of toleration."[23] "This fact /Woodhouse continues/ gave them an immense advantage outside Parliament; for it enabled them to draw support from the Parties of the Left, almost unrepresented in the House of Commons, but strong in the Army, on which in the last

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[20]Ibid., p. 15.

[21]Ibid., pp. 15-16.

[22]This is, as George L. Mosse points out, at variance with Leo Solt's view, published later, which sees no necessarily logical development of general religious liberty from the Independents' position (see n. 5 this chapter). In fairness to Woodhouse, however, it must be said that he states that although Independency was the more "radical" creed (more than Presbyterianism, that is)--in its willingness to give up on King and Parliament and rely on the army--it was not necessarily more democratic, as the Independents' temporary allies the Levellers found out, to their chagrin.

[23]Woodhouse, pp. 15-16.

analysis the Independents relied."[24]

The third victor-group Woodhouse identifies as the "Parties of the Left, the sectaries, religious and political," who "were a heterogeneous company among whom the winds of doctrine assumed the proportions of a tempest."[25] They were, Woodhouse says, "descended from the Separatists and Anabaptists, as the Independents were from the more sedate Congregationalists, and were, so to speak, the Independents' poor relations."[26] The two points which the various sects agreed upon, Woodhouse contends, were "the belief in a total separation of church and state and the demand for liberty of conscience."[27]

Woodhouse divides the "Parties of the Left" into two main groupings. One coalesced around the "Levellers . . . , the political doctrinaires, led by Lilburne, Overton, Wildman, and others."[28] It is "recognizable as predominately democratic in tendency, and ultimately secular in aim, though it maintains its emphasis on liberty of conscience and at times adopts the language of religious enthusiasm."[29] The other grouping consisted of sects whose representative may be taken as "the Fifth

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[24]Ibid.

[25]Ibid., pp. 17-18.

[26]This characterization is in my opinion open to serious question, or at least qualification, particularly at the point where he makes a sharp distinction between Separatists and Congregationalists--but it is not my purpose here to go into the matter of the origins of the various sect groups.

[27]Woodhouse, p. 18.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Ibid.

Monarchy Men, the religious doctrinaires."[30] Of this grouping Woodhouse states:

> It emphasizes not the rights of the people, but the privileges of the Saints, and it looks forward to the millenium (which always seems to be just around the corner) when the Saints shall inherit the earth and rule it with, or on behalf of, Christ.[31]

The fourth main victor-party is, in Woodhouse's view, the Erastian persuasion.[32]

I do not intend at this point to go further into the nature or history of the sects allied with the Independents in the struggle for religious liberty. I have found of particular interest in this regard the Appendix to Norman Cohn's The Pursuit of the Millenium,[33] entitled "The 'Free Spirit' in Cromwell's England: the Ranters and Their Literature"; and P. G. Rogers, The Fifth Monarchy Men.[34]

Among the Independents to the left of the Dissenting Brethren, yet not involved in the leadership of one of the specific sects, Thomas Goodwin's brother John is usually mentioned as being the most prominent.[35] His work is quite sufficiently extensive to provide material for a separate dissertation.

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Above, p. 91.

[33] (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961; first pub. 1957).

[34] (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966). A recent short notice in the English Historical Review (LXXXIII, April, 1968, p. 397) by Christopher Hill contained some strong reservations about the book. Nonetheless, I have found it helpful in understanding the sect in relation to Independency generally.

[35] Gooch, in English Democratic Ideas, for instance, simply calls him "the leader of the Independents." (p. 112) See above, pp. 87-88.

PART V. CONCLUSION

CHAPTER XI

THE CLASSICAL INDEPENDENCY OF THE DISSENTING BRETHREN: A DISTINCT ECCLESIOLOGICAL ALTERNATIVE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

According to William Haller, the real point of central importance about the Dissenting Brethren is tied up not so much with the details of what they said, but with the fact that "in speaking, however moderately, against a too rigid application of presbyterian principles, they spoke for all who desired a certain latitude in the church, and they gave the signal for many to speak with less moderation for a wider freedom than they themselves conceived."[1] They, "though a minority in the assembly, represented a large if confused body of opinion outside."[2]

This view, then, sees the important role of the Dissenting Brethren--particularly in relation to the publication of An Apologeticall Narration--as that of catalysts for the whole

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[1]Haller, Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution, p. 119.

[2]Ibid., pp. 118-19.

movement toward toleration and religious and political liberty. They, according to Haller, were instrumental in the beginning of a window-opening process which others more radical than they carried through to conclusions rather at variance with their own predilections.

W. K. Jordan was of the same view with regard to the chief role played by the Dissenting Brethren in the history of England in the 1640's and 1650's. Of the five plus John Goodwin and Henry Burton he wrote:

> They debated, preached, and wrote steadily during the critical years of the Civil War and had within a short time established leadership over a movement, with a base far broader than Congregationalism, which had set itself with unalterable determination against the intolerance of the Presbyterian demands.[3]

So "they were forced into an opposition that became increasingly sterner and found themselves quite involuntarily vested with the leadership of a movement dedicated to the cause of religious toleration which included a motley array of really radical sects."[4]

Jordan here usually uses the term "Congregationalism" for the narrower religious movement, what was to become a dissenting denomination. It is this grouping to which I have seen the Dissenting Brethren centrally related. He usually uses the term "Independency" for the broader religio-political

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[3]Jordan, The Development of Religious Toleration in England, Vol. III, p. 354.

[4]Ibid., pp. 354-55.

movement toward toleration and liberty which included the more free-thinking theorists among whom John Goodwin was pre-eminent, and also included the members of the radical sects.[5] The Dissenting Brethren are seen as essentially of the former grouping, but only really important as they, almost unwittingly, contributed to the cause of the latter grouping.

Jordan asserts that Congregationalism as an institutionalized religious movement was simply not a very important phenomenon on the English scene in the seventeenth century. He says that "in so far as it was an organized religious body Independency remained a minor sect whose churches and membership bore but slight relation to the great influence which it was to have upon political and religious thought in England."[6] The influence came from being the genesis and center of a sectarian and lay-backed movement for toleration and liberty.[7] Jordan thus asks the reader to consider the Dissenting Brethren as highly important in the role of originating agents for a movement toward toleration and religious and political liberty.[8]

I would not care to contest the assertion that the Dissenting Brethren were important as catalytic agents--through An Apologeticall Narration and their work in the Westminster

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[5] Ibid., p. 354.

[6] Ibid., p. 354.

[7] Ibid., pp. 357-58.

[8] Ibid., p. 112.

Assembly--for the broader religio-political movement called Independency, with whose outcome they were not entirely in sympathy. I have not, however, seen fit to limit their significance to this important but largely political role. Theologically speaking, I have seen the Dissenting Brethren's work as central and crucial for the development of early Congregationalism's theory of the church. This involves the corollary assumption that religious or theological Independency in the seventeenth century may be seen to have been important--despite its relative insignificance numerically, and its existence in the shadows of the much more all-pervading movement toward toleration and liberty which I have referred to as political Independency. It is to be seen as important, I have said, because it provides in its assertion of the covenanted Congregationalism of particular visible churches a clear and consistent ecclesiological alternative to the major state-church oriented ecclesiologies of its day, especially those of Anglicanism and Presbyterianism, and yet is sufficiently attuned to the spiritual needs of the general populace to remain relevant to general questions about the relationship of church and society, as the sects on its left usually were not.

The separatists as such, provided an alternative ecclesiological stance, but it was an alternative which left most of the "corrupt" nation without significant religious recourse. The separatists were only concerned to withdraw from an evil society. Sects on the left of the Congregationalists were

either largely political in basic motivation (the Levellers) or so millenarian as to fail to provide a viable, practical religious alternative for the nation in the historical situation in which it actually found itself. Only the Congregational Independents took a sufficiently middle ground and maintained it in such a balanced way as to have any real hope of continuing to stress their own central ecclesiological insight while at the same time keeping an openness and relevance toward the national religious needs and aspirations. They offered the alternative of a gathered voluntary churchmanship organized as the national religious expression. This involved tension between two visions of the church, but a tension which they saw at least the possibility of surmounting for the benefit of the greater good inherent in being able to maintain both ideals at once.

Berndt Gustafsson sees as the "interesting and unique phenomenon" of this covenanted Congregationalism, the classical Independency of the Dissenting Brethren, the presumed fact that "here we meet a church ideal, where a local democratic order was claimed without any abandonment of the principle of the territorial church."[9] There is a degree of truth to this, but it is far from being entirely correct. I have noted from time to time in this dissertation the inner tension--shown perhaps most clearly in almost contradictory paragraphs in the platform

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[9]Gustafsson, p. 51.

of polity of the Savoy Declaration--between the Separatist tendencies inherent in the ideal of a gathered Congregational church, and the strong residual feeling of obligation toward the remains of the state-church experienced by the Dissenting Brethren and their allies in classical Independency. To the extent that such a tension continued to exist throughout the post-Separatist phases in the history of seventeenth-century Congregationalism, Gustafsson's contention, in basic form, is true.

It does not, however, stand up under detailed analysis. For, first of all, he contrasts "a local democratic order" with "the principle of the territorial church." And the gathered, covenanted Congregationalism expressed in particular visible churches which the Dissenting Brethren and their allies espoused was not, certainly, "democratic" in the twentieth-century understanding of the term. There was, to be sure, a germ of democracy in the right of choice of their Elders which the people of the congregations possessed. They chose and set apart their rulers. But from that point on their right consisted normally in the obligation to consent to the "rule" of the Elders in the congregation. This was not understood as leadership by persuasion; rather, the Elders were to be considered the agents of Christ in his direct administration of the spiritual life of his people. The people were to challenge their judgment only in those rare cases where there was a clear-cut situation of mal-administration or scandalous sin involving the Elders.

In such cases occasional and specially-called Synods could be expected to exert the pressure of Christ's judgment against the erring church officers, as that judgment was determined by duly-appointed commissioners from neighbor-churches. Such Synods, however, had no legal right to expel church officers in a particular congregation.[10]

Secondly, Gustaffson speaks of "a church ideal . . . without any abandonment of the principle of the territorial church." This is surely an overstatement. Roman Catholicism had a state-church-oriented ecclesiology. Anglicanism continued this. And Presbyterianism refused to relinquish it, carrying it in Scotland to the point of the virtual control of the state by the Kirk, as James VI complained. Congregationalism, however, was primarily concerned to realize its ideal of a gathered, covenanted, visible instituted church with a minimum of interference from the National Church when, in the early 1640's, it looked as if that church would be officially Presbyterian, and with a feeling of responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the remnant of the church establishment when, in the 1650's, Independency temporarily held the field. This is not to say, however, that the Congregational Independents (to use Jordan's terminology) felt any great zeal for constructing a Congregational state-church system beyond a loose confederation of particular visible churches through which their conception

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[10] Above, pp. 139ff., 151ff., et passim.

of the church catholic could become operative. It was, indeed, not until the nineteenth century that a "Congregational Union" was organized on a national scale for England and Wales. Before that only county associations provided what loose connectionalism English Congregationalism possessed.

Robert Paul contends that "the basic issue" for the Dissenting Brethren is contained in the question "And what further authority?"[11] By this he means that they are asking what further authority beyond that of the pastoral rule of the officers of a covenanted particular congregation is consistent with the spirit of Christ's rule in his church. Their answer to this, he says, is that no coercive legal authority for disciplinary purposes is thus consistent. Advisory councils are consistent, so long as they do not possess the legal power of excommunication, or the power to expel a congregation from the circle of recipients of Christ's grace.

About the Dissenting Brethren Paul states that "by concentrating jurisdiction in the local church they actually introduce a very radical modification of the system practiced by most of the Reformed Churches."[12] Yet this question of polity, the question as to "whether the presbytery (or synod) was to have equal power to that of ecclesia prima, the local church,"[13] was not, Paul thinks, "the real point at issue."

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[11] Paul, An Apologeticall Narration, Chap. V.

[12] Ibid., p. 114.

[13] Ibid., p. 118.

It was "something much deeper--the nature of spiritual authority itself."[14] And here he goes on to make the claim for the Independency of the Dissenting Brethren which I have noted earlier,[15] that this tradition in the seventeenth century came closer to exercising spiritual authority according to the mind of Christ than did that of their less enlightened ecclesiastical opponents. This they conceived to be done not legalistically, but in a spirit of mutual love and communion.

That it was the Dissenting Brethren's intention in their best moments to use the authority-structures of covenanted Congregationalism to achieve these agape-oriented results is clear. That they thought covenanted Congregationalism a far superior and far more scripturally-warranted vehicle for the attainment of these ends I do not question. Indeed, demonstrating that this is just what they did think has been one of my purposes in this study. What I have objected to in Paul's presentation is the apparent contention that they, though often weak and literalistic, succeeded sufficiently in living out their assumptions to demonstrate for the benefit of later generations the inherent superiority for Christian purposes of the Congregational way's approach to churchmanship. This seemed to me an exercise in denominational partiality which the church historian could well minimize.

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Above, pp. 197-201.

Having now considered what major interpreters say about the Dissenting Brethren's type of Independent churchmanship, I shall give attention again to what they themselves have to say about it. By way of final recapitulation and summary, then, we have seen that what sets the classical Independency of the Dissenting Brethren apart from major state-church-oriented systems of the seventeenth century as a clear and distinct ecclesiological alternative, is its espousal of the covenanted Congregationalism of a particular visible church. The old covenant of works having failed, God in his mercy initiates a Covenant of Grace, wherein he promises to be his called-out people's God, and they promise to live faithfully in the light of his commandments. The Covenant made with a nation-people Israel is, with Christ, broadened to include the Gentiles.

On the basis of this Covenant with God's now broader-based chosen people, those for whom Christ died, the individual may in a conversion experience enter into a personal covenant relation with God, claiming the promise of salvation for himself, or "pleading the Covenant," as the Independents put it. This is a private experience, an experience undergone in a person's "closet." Such an experience compels the believer to seek the fellowship and communion of those who have similarly covenanted with God, who have accepted the conditions of the Covenant of Grace--loving obedience to God's will after humble repentance for sin.[16]

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[16]See above, especially pp. 263-64.

Such elect persons, visible Saints, draw together, by Christ's command, then, into societies in which mutual relations with andobligations to God and the fellow-members are avowed. Such public avowal takes the form in usual cases of an explicit written covenant, on the basis of which a congregation, a particular visible church, is formed. It is a society of righteous men, repentant sinners who have undertaken disciplined conduct and set out to regulate closely their lives under the stern, yet loving and brotherly, rule of elected officers, whose functions in administering his ordinances Christ has explained in his word. Through definite regular procedures for admonition and, if necessary, excommunication, consciences are kept sharply attuned to the demands of Christian living; and those who will not abide by this rule are, regretfully yet absolutely, weeded out of the fellowship.

To this fellowship the term kingdom of God may be applied by scriptural warrant. In the eyes of seventeenth-century Congregationalists there was here created a qualitatively different brand of churchmanship, a superior vehicle for expressing the implications of Christ's bestowal of the keys on Peter. In absolute terms they felt that here, in particular covenanted congregations, was to be found Christ's church, and nowhere else. And sometimes they said just this. Their Separatist forebears said it quite without equivocation.

The classical Independents, however, were somewhat more ambiguous on this point as a general rule. When at their

most militant, they asserted that their church was the only true church, the only form of the church blessed by Christ. At the same time, the Dissenting Brethren and their allies were conscious of their involvement in the larger Puritan movement, a movement in which they stood side-by-side with the Presbyterians on the one hand and the sectarians on the other in their opposition to Laudian Anglicanism and the King and royalist armed forces which defended it. They could not, therefore, bring themselves--either theoretically or as a purely practical matter--to speak most of the time in terms which totally unchurched these allies. Thus they could speak of the multitudes in Church of England parishes who were true Christians, and could conceive of such parishes as true churches of Christ when they contained a significant contingent of Saints, despite their mixture there with the ungodly. And these considerations could apply whether the parish churches in question acknowledged an episcopal or a presbyterian hierarchical structure.

When the Congregationalists spoke in these terms, they conceived the fullness of the church in its scriptural authenticity to inhere only in their own structuring of it, but did not deny that there were other, less pure and correct, forms of the church. Thus, to use terms current in later discussions, portions of Anglicanism and Presbyterianism were acknowledged by the Congregational Independents as possessing the _esse_ of the church, while only they were in possession of the _plene esse_.

Here was not, then, a sweeping condemnation of all other kinds of presumed churchmanship. Rather, here was, in the simplest possible terms, an assertion that both Christlike love and moral rigor were best expressed in the context of mutual personal relations solemnly and bindingly entered into. Within the corporate structures of particular covenanted congregations, heights and depths of expression of what it meant to be a Christian could be achieved in ways not deemed possible in either the automatic and loose relationships obtaining in Anglican parish churches or the legalistically-inclined complications of the Presbyterian system of subordinate assemblies. Here in the congregation, where men knew each other intimately and could under the Spirit's guidance choose persons from among their own number to serve Christ in his direct rule of his elect people, Christ, they felt, chose to apply his mandate, and to rule through them as King and Head of the church.

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